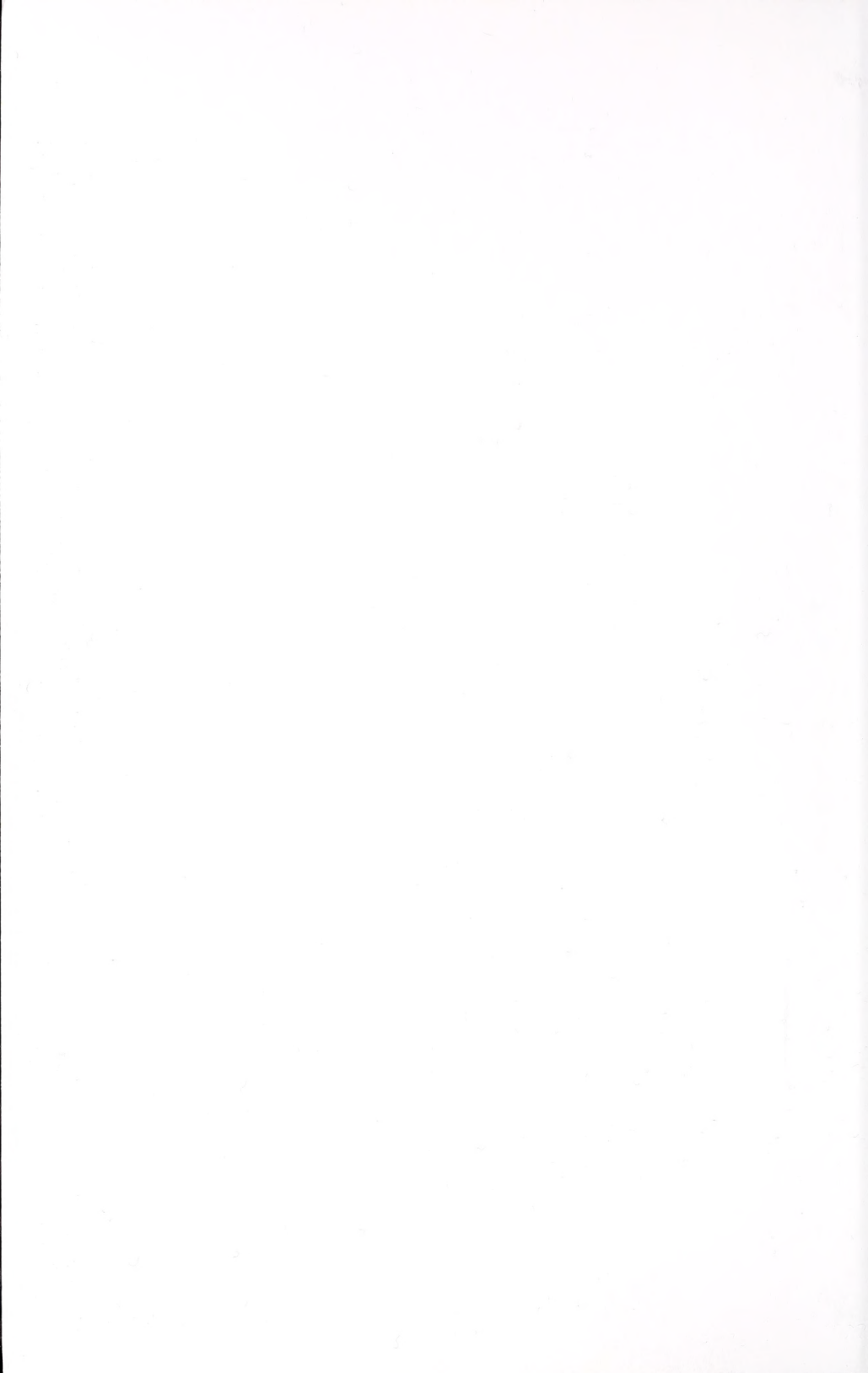


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1995





# Copiah-Lincoln Community College

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## *Microcosm . . .*

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college and area high school students. Selected college entries compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the high school division of 1995 competition include the members of the *Microcosm* staff and the English faculty, who are Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Pamela Grillis, Pamela Reid, Evelyn Sutton and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of Humanities. Others assisting in judging the 1995 competition include Ann Hawkins and Burlan Walker.

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# Happy Birthday, Victoria

Dara Speed

Victoria was tired. It was Friday and she now had two days of rest before she had to start another week of work. She is going to spend tomorrow with her children and her grandchildren to celebrate her eightieth birthday.

Victoria knew she was old, but she tried to live every day as if it were her last. She thinks that she must do anything she can to fulfill herself before she has to go to live with God. She often tells her friends that everyone deserves a chance in life, no matter what they have done. She picks up hitch-hikers, gives money to people begging on the streets, makes generous donations to various charities and churches, and gives food and clothing to the shelters for the homeless. She is living her life to the fullest.

Victoria was on her way upstairs to take a bath when she heard "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" playing in the kitchen. It was her microwave oven. She couldn't figure out why it played songs for her. She had a repair man come to look at it, but there was no problem to be found, and there was no explanation for the music. The microwave was the last thing her husband had given her before he died, so Victoria could not bear to give it away.

When the song ended, Victoria went to take her bath. She had worked hard all day at the Youth Center where she was a volunteer. Each day after the center closed, Victoria used the fitness room to work out. She's a firm believer in physical fitness, and she works out five days a week. This past week was particularly hard for her. She knew she would have to work even harder now that she was turning eighty.

After her bath, Victoria tried to call Bob, her oldest child. Bob works in an Antique shop. When he was a little boy, his great-grandmother Dolly had given him some old school books of hers, and some Indians Arrowheads she had found around her daddy's farm. Bob treasured these items, and the older he got, the more interested in antiques he became. Bob had a special interest in Early American things and he eventually opened a store to sell the pieces that he had acquired at various estate sales throughout the southern states.

Victoria couldn't get an answer at Bob's house. She looked at



her watch, but it was only 6:45. He probably wasn't home from work yet, so Victoria fixed her supper. She would call him after she ate. She fixed spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread. Just as she sat down to eat, her microwave started playing "Summertime," a song her husband used to sing to their kids all the time. Victoria often wondered if her husband was haunting her microwave so she wouldn't forget him. She would never forget him! They were married for fifty-two years, had two children, and four grandchildren. He had been dead for eleven years now, but his memory always surrounded her. Their house was full of all the good times and the bad times they shared together, and she could not stand to move away from all that.

After Victoria had finished her dinner, she started cleaning the kitchen. Just as she started washing the dishes, the phone rang. It was Bob.

"Hello," Victoria answered.

"Hi, Mom, how are you?" Bob asked.

"I'm fine, Bob, how are you?"

"I'm okay, Mom. Listen, we won't be able to have dinner at my house tomorrow. We are having trouble with the plumbing and it can't be fixed until Monday. Would it be okay if we met at Tori's house instead?"

Victoria sighed deeply. She hated to go to her daughter's house. "That's fine, Bob, what time should I be there?"

"How about 11:30? We will probably eat around 12:00, and that will give you some time to spend with the kids before dinner."

"That's fine, son. I'll see you tomorrow. I love you."

"I love you too, Mom. Have a good night."

Victoria hung up the phone and finished washing her dishes.

Now that the kitchen was clean, Victoria could relax. Victoria went into the living room to watch a little TV. There wasn't anything interesting on, so she just sat on the couch, lost in thought. She really didn't want to go to Tori's house tomorrow. Tori never mowed her grass. The city had done it for her on several occasions, and now they are going to take her to court. No matter how many times Victoria had begged her to keep her yard looking neat, she wouldn't do it. Tori was always looking for a way to embarrass Victoria. She had been like that since she was a child. Well, now she is going to be sued for having a unsightly yard. Tori just isn't



concerned with all that, she doesn't care. Victoria is very worried about her.

The sounds of "Amazing Grace" broke into Victoria's thoughts. It was 10:30, and time to go to bed. Her microwave played "Amazing Grace" every night at the same time, and every night she would go to bed when it played.

Victoria went upstairs to get ready for bed. She put on her gown, brushed her teeth, said her prayers, and got into bed. Tonight was a little different. Tomorrow she would be eighty years old. Tonight was her last night to be in her seventies. A new decade of her life was about to start, while an old one was being laid to rest.

Victoria woke early the next morning. She was up at 5:00, and that was unusual for her. She normally didn't get up until 6:30. She decided to fix her breakfast and read the paper. She went downstairs, put on a pot of coffee, put some bread in the toaster, and put two slices of ham in the microwave. While these things were cooking, she walked outside to get her paper. Victoria looked all around. It was going to be a beautiful day. The sun was peeking out over the horizon, and she could hear some birds chirping in the trees. Victoria went back inside. She poured a cup of coffee, buttered her toast, put her ham on a plate, and sat down to eat.

While she was eating, she read the paper. Every morning she read the obituaries first, to see if she had died in the night. The paper was full of crime, violence, talk of war, and sports. The usual stuff for a Saturday morning paper. Sometimes Victoria wished that the paper would be filled with nothing but good news, that no bad things would enter into anyone's life. Why couldn't everyone be at peace?

After she finished her breakfast, Victoria washed her dishes and went upstairs to get dressed. She took her time selecting the clothes she wanted to wear. Today is a special day for her, she is now eighty. She picked out a pale blue dress with matching shoes and purse. She decided to wear the pearls her husband had given fifty years ago, for her birthday. She took extra care when she fixed her hair and makeup. She wanted her children to be proud to have her as their mother.

Just as she finished dressing, she heard "You Are My Sunshine" playing on her microwave. Her heart was bursting with joy. Her

husband had sung that for her every year on her birthday, and each year since his death, her microwave has played it for her since he was not there to serenade her. Victoria felt his presence more than she ever had before.

Victoria decided to go down to the homeless shelter before she went to her daughter's house. She often went there to tell the people there stories. She really enjoyed the times she spent with them; it gave her a sense of belonging. When she arrived, it was 7:00, and the people were eating their breakfast. Some of them knew her and were excited to see her. One of the men who knew her, walked up to her and gave her a brown paper sack. She looked into the bag and it had some Indian Arrowheads in it. She was stunned. No one here had ever given her anything before.

"Hi, Miss Victoria, my name is Tom. I have listened to your stories for a long time now, and I remembered you telling a story about your son who collects arrowheads. I found these just outside of the city limits, and I thought you son might like to have them."

"Thank you so much, Tom. I'm sure Bob will like them very much. You are a special man. God bless you." Victoria smiled at Tom, and took her seat to begin telling her story.

"The story I'm going to tell you today is about something that happened when I was a little girl. My parents had bought a house along the Yellow River near Milton, Florida. The house was very big, and my sister and I were allowed to have separate bedrooms. My two brothers decided that they liked sharing a room, so they kept that arrangement, even though there were enough rooms for them to have a room of their own. We were confused about the house. Half of it was boarded up, leaving no way for us to get to that side of the house to explore, so we were very curious about it.

"The first night we actually stayed the night, we thought we heard voices shouting. My sister came into my room and we talked about it for a while, and quickly decided that our brothers were playing a practical joke on us. The next morning, we pretended that we hadn't heard anything because we didn't want to get our brothers in trouble.

"We heard these voices every night. One night, the moon was full and we started hearing the voices louder than we had before. My sister and I went to our brothers' room to tell them to be quiet, we were tired of hearing them trying to scare us. We had a big

surprise when we got to their room; they were fast asleep. We decided to wake them up to see if they had heard the voices. When we finally got them awake, they heard the same thing we did. We walked into our parents room and woke them up. Daddy sighed and told our mother that we might as well be told why we kept hearing the voices.

“At that point, we heard pool balls clicking together, a lot of shouting, a gunshot, someone running, and the sound of a window breaking. We all gave our parents a startled look and demanded an explanation.

“Our parents told us all to get up on the bed and they would tell us what was going on. My father began to tell us about the house. He told us the house had been owned by two brothers about twenty years ago, and they were both in love with the same girl. They each built a section of the house to try to impress her and win her love. When the house was completed, she chose the older brother Ray. The younger brother John was irate. He couldn't believe that the love of his life, Nancy, would choose his brother over him. John was convinced that Ray had threatened Nancy so she would choose him. One night while Nancy was away visiting her mother, John challenged Ray to a game of pool. While they were playing, John accused Ray of threatening Nancy. Ray was outraged at the very thought of that. The two brothers started shouting at each other, fighting over a girl. By this time, John was beyond all reason. He pulled a gun out of his pocket, aimed it at his brother and shot him. Just as his brother fell to the floor, Nancy walked in. She screamed at John, telling him that he killed the only man she had ever loved. John finally realized that he had not only lost his brother, but he had lost his chance with Nancy as well. He felt that he no longer had any reason to live, so he threw himself out of the second floor window. Nancy was never heard from again. It was thought that she had run away to join a convent.

“After my father finished telling us what had happened in the house, he gave us a choice of staying in the house, or moving. We all decided that we would stay, we liked the big house, and now that we knew what the noises were, they wouldn't bother us.”

Victoria looked at her watch. It was 9:45 and she needed to get home to freshen up before she went to her daughter's house. She told everyone in the shelter it was time for her to go, and they all

thanked her for the story.

When Victoria got home, she went upstairs to touch up her hair and make-up. With that chore done, she headed downstairs for a cup of coffee before she had to go to Tori's house. As she walked into the kitchen, her microwave started playing "You'll Never Walk Alone." It was as if the microwave knew how much she dreaded going to Tori's house. Victoria would never figure out how the microwave knew what to play, and when to play it. The only thing she was convinced of was that her dead husband was haunting her microwave. That was the only explanation for the songs.

It was time for Victoria to leave. She sighed deeply, picked up her purse, and headed out the door. As she got into her car, she looked back toward the house. She looked up at her bedroom window, and as she did, she thought she saw her husband standing there. She knew her imagination was playing tricks on her, or was it?

When Victoria got to Tori's house, she noticed that the grass still hadn't been cut. She was very disappointed. She thought that Tori might make an exception for her, and mow her grass. She should have known better. Victoria parked her car in the driveway, noticing that Bob wasn't here yet. Tori's kids came running out of the house to greet Victoria.

"Hi ,Granny, we are so glad to see you!"

"Hi, kids. I've missed you. Why haven't you been to see me?"

"Mom won't let us take the car. She's afraid that we'll get in trouble if we try to drive any further than the corner grocery." This was from Jim, the oldest of the two.

"Yeah, Mom is so protective. You would think that we were seven and eight years old instead of seventeen and eighteen. She still treats us like we're babies," said Danny.

"Well, your mother just wants you to be safe. I was the same way with my children," said Victoria.

The boys led her inside and went to tell their mother that she was here. Victoria looked around the house. It was amazing that the inside was immaculate, yet the outside looked so trashy. Victoria just didn't understand her daughter. Hadn't she raised her right? Did she go wrong somewhere?

Tori came into the room, looking as if she had just stepped off



the pages of Vogue. She was dressed like she was going out to meet the President. Victoria knew Tori had dressed like that to try to embarrass her mother. Victoria was upset that Tori could be so childish at times.

"Hi, Mom. Bob called and said he would be a little late. Can I get you something to drink while we are waiting for him?"

"No, thank you, dear. I'll wait until we eat. How have you been? You haven't called in a while, and you are never home when I try to call you."

"I've been doing okay. I've just been busy lately, and I haven't had time to call you. I'm sorry if I worried you."

"That's okay. I just wish you would call every now and then to let me know if you are doing all right. I worry about you and the kids."

"I'll try to do better. I can't promise anything though. With this court case coming up, I've got my hands full. I just can't believe the city is going to take me to court for such a stupid thing as not mowing my yard."

"I've tried to tell you that you must make an effort to keep your yard clean. You can't expect your neighbors to appreciate that you don't care."

"Lay off, Mom. I get enough static from the law, and I don't need any from you."

Tori's doorbell rang. As Tori went to answer it, Victoria said a small prayer, asking God to help her make it through the day. Bob walked into the den just as Victoria finished her prayer.

"Hi, Mom. Happy Birthday." Bob leaned over to kiss his mother.

"Thank you, honey. You are the first person to wish me that. Where are Rita and the kids?"

"They went to take some stuff into the kitchen. I was sent to bring you into eat. May I have the honor of escorting you?"

"You certainly may. I would be honored to have you as my escort."

"Well, let's go then," said Bob as he offered his mother his arm. "Your dinner awaits you."

Victoria and Bob went into the dining room. The table was set for a queen. A beautiful flower arrangement sat in the middle of the table, china plates sat at each place setting, crystal goblets sat

ready for the drinks to be poured, and the silverware resting on linen napkins waited to be used.

Victoria looked around at her family. They were all looking at her with smiles on their faces. Victoria had tears in her eyes. She had not expected all this extravagance. She knew now that Tori had not set out to embarrass her.

"Tori, you didn't have to go through this trouble," Victoria said.

"It wasn't any trouble Mom. I did it because I love you, and I want you to have a happy birthday," Tori said this as she hugged her mother.

"Shall we sit down and eat?" Tori asked.

"That is a great idea. You don't know how hungry I am." Victoria replied.

Everyone sat down at the table. Bob said a blessing and then Tori, Rita and the girls went to bring the food to the table. When everything was brought in from the kitchen, there was little talking as everyone started eating.

"Hi, girls. How are you?"

"We're fine, Grammy. Happy birthday," replied Kathy, the youngest.

"Happy birthday, Grammy. It's good to see you. I hope I look as good as you do when I turn eighty," said Susan.

Victoria looked at her grandchildren. She was very lucky to have four of the best grands a woman could have. Danny and Jim were two nice looking young men, and Kathy and Susan were two beautiful young ladies. All of her grandchildren made her proud to be called Grandma or Grammy.

Tori and Rita had fixed an excellent meal. They had salad, roast, potatoes, field peas, corn on the cob, corn bread and tea. When everyone had finished eating, Danny, Jim, Susan, and Kathy cleared the table while Bob went to get Victoria's presents. Rita went into the kitchen to help the kids with the dishes; Tori and her mother were left alone at the table.

"Tori, I know you don't want to talk about your yard, but I would like to know why you refuse to mow it."

"Mom, all my life I have tried to do the best I could. It seems to me that no matter what I do, it is never good enough for you. I do all the things I do to see if you really love me or if you are ashamed of me. I want you to love me for who I am inside and

not what I do. I have always felt like I fell short of your expectations and that you don't love me. You are always harping on the things I do wrong, and you never praise me for the good I do. You are the reason I don't mow my yard. I know that you will be ashamed of me anyway, so why should I bother to try to do any better?"

Victoria frowned. "Tori, I love you no matter what you do. If I have made you feel that I don't love you, I am dreadfully sorry. I never knew you felt that way. I wish you would have come to me before now, and maybe we could have worked things out. I know words don't mean anything, but I want you to know that I love you with all my heart. No matter what you do, you are my daughter and I will stand beside you for as long as I live."

Tori poured some more tea before she answered her mother. "Mom, I love you very much. You make me proud, and I will try to do better to make you proud of me. I will make an effort to keep my yard cleaned up. I know I have been wrong all these years. I'm glad we had a chance to talk today. I'm sorry that it took this long for me to tell you how I feel. Can you ever forgive me?"

Victoria got up, walked to Tori, and put her arms around her daughter. "Tori, I am always proud of you. I can forgive you for anything that you do because I love you. Don't ever forget that. I love you, honey."

Tori looked up at her mother and smiled through her tears. "I love you, too. In my heart I have always known that you weren't ashamed of me, but I guess I was too stubborn to admit it."

Bob, Rita, and the kids return, their arms filled. Bob and the children have their arms loaded with presents, and Rita was carrying a large birthday cake, lit up with eighty candles. The whole family started singing "Happy Birthday To You," and Victoria felt the tears well up in her eyes.

When her family finished singing, Victoria made her wish. She wished that everyone could be blessed with a family like hers. She blew out the candles, and then cut the cake. When everyone had a piece of cake, Victoria started opening her presents. She got clothes, perfume, drawings, and knick-knacks.

"Thank you all so much for everything. I couldn't have asked for better gifts."

Bob looked at his mother with a smile on his face. "Mom, you

still have one more present coming to you . It's supposed to be dropped off at your house this afternoon. Why don't we go to your house and wait for it,"

Victoria looked puzzled. "What is it?"

"It's a surprise, Mom. We decided to go in together to get you this gift."

"Okay, son, I won't ask you to spoil your surprise. Can the kids ride with me?"

"I don't care if the kids don't," said Bob.

"Neither do I," replied Tori.

The kids were glad to ride with their grandmother. It gave them a chance to get away from their parents, and spend some time with their grandmother.

When they got to her house, Victoria went to make a pot of coffee. While she was in the kitchen, she looked out the window into the backyard, her husband's favorite place to play with their children and grandchildren. Victoria left the window to put the tray of coffee and drinks together. As she was heading into the living room, she looked out the window again. She nearly dropped the tray. She could have sworn she saw her husband standing in the yard.

Victoria shook her head and looked out the window again. There was no one there. She knew her husband was dead, and she was missing him terribly, so she must have imagined seeing him.

Just as she entered the living room, the door bell rang.

"I'll get it, Granny," said Danny as he ran to the door.

Bob followed Danny at a slower pace. Victoria started to follow too, but Tori stopped her.

"Mom, Bob will bring your gift to you. Please be a little patient."

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm just excited about this surprise."

Bob walked in the room carrying a large box. "Mom, here is your surprise. Hurry up. Open it."

Victoria walked over to the large box and opened it. Inside was a microwave oven. She slowly closed the box, and looked at her children.

"I'm sorry, but I can't accept this. You're going to have to return it."

"Mom," Rita said, "we want to give you this. The one you have



is almost twelve years old. Please accept it.”

“I can’t. The one I have is fine.”

“Mother, the microwave you have is old. It could be a fire hazard, and we want you to take the new one.” Tori said.

Victoria sat quietly. She was debating about whether or not to tell her kids about the microwave.

‘Mom, you need this microwave. It’s just too dangerous for you to keep the old one,’ Bob stated firmly.

“No Bob, I’m going to keep the old one. It was one of the last things your father gave me before he died. I know you will think I’m crazy, but I feel your father’s soul is connected with it.”

Tori laughed. “Mom, you are just being sentimental. There is no way Daddy’s soul is in the microwave. Be realistic, you want to keep it just because Daddy gave it to you.”

Victoria looked at Tori with sadness in her eyes. “Tori, there is more to it than that. The microwave is special. As crazy as it may sound, that microwave plays music for me, songs that your father used to sing to all of us.”

Bob looked concerned. “Mom, you’ve been working too hard. You need to take a vacation and rest. Your imagination has been working overtime.”

Just as Bob finished speaking, they could hear “Summertime” coming from the kitchen. Victoria smiled as everyone rushed to see where the music was coming from. When Victoria entered the kitchen, the kids were staring at the microwave in awe.

“Mom, that’s the song Daddy used to sing to us. It’s like he’s letting us know he’s here, and that a new microwave would banish him from the house.” Tori was crying as she said this.

Bob also had tears in his eyes, and Rita was crying softly at the kitchen table.

“Kids, I know this is a shock to you. I’m sorry I never said anything about this before, but I didn’t think you would believe me. It’s getting late. Why don’t you go home and get some rest. Come by tomorrow and we will talk about this.”

“That’s a good idea, Mom,” Bob said as he kissed his mother. “Rita, girls, let’s go home. We’ll see you tomorrow, Mom. Happy birthday.”

Tori and the boys left shortly after Bob did. Victoria sat alone at the kitchen table and cried. She missed her husband. When she

could cry no more, she sat with her head resting on the table.

"Victoria, please don't cry for me any more." Victoria looked up and saw the image of her husband standing next to the chair.

"Roy, how?... What...?"

"I've been here all along. I told you when we married that I would watch over you forever and I meant it. I love you, Victoria, always remember that."

As Roy faded away, the microwave started playing "Amazing Grace." It was 10:30, time to go bed. Victoria went upstairs, put on her gown, brushed her teeth, and got down on her knees by her bed.

"Dear God, thank you so much for the family you have given me. You were watching over me when you sent Roy into my life, and you've never quit. You have graced me with a fine family and a wonderful life. Thank you for allowing Roy to watch over me, and allowing him to comfort me. I only ask that you will watch over my family as you have watched over me. Amen."

Victoria climbed into bed and turned out her lamp. Just as she was about to fall asleep, she felt someone kiss her. This was the best birthday she could have asked for.

## Ligeia II: Penance For Wishes

Tina Reed Hearn

*Sbrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber* the face of Ligeia stared back at me. This face was that of Ligeia in feature but not in spirit. Demonic eyes leered at me as if dissecting my very soul. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of my heart as I gazed at the decayed flesh partially covered by the death shroud.

The putrid stench from the living-dead flesh of Ligeia filled the air almost taking my breath away. The bloodless skin of Ligeia was the cold gray hue of pewter. The blue veins in her forehead throbbed rhythmically as Ligeia gasped for each breath. Suddenly Ligeia lashed at me slashing the flesh of my face with her black-nailed fingers. The blood wept swiftly down my cheek.

I sensed an unholy spirit in the form of my lost love Ligeia. It was not the will of Ligeia to return to me, but that of my selfish needs to have her return to me. I had summoned the demonic being which stood before me. I could hear her saying over and over, "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not." I had unlocked the mystery of the soul's will, but the soul was not willing to return, therefore her soul had met me with vengeance.

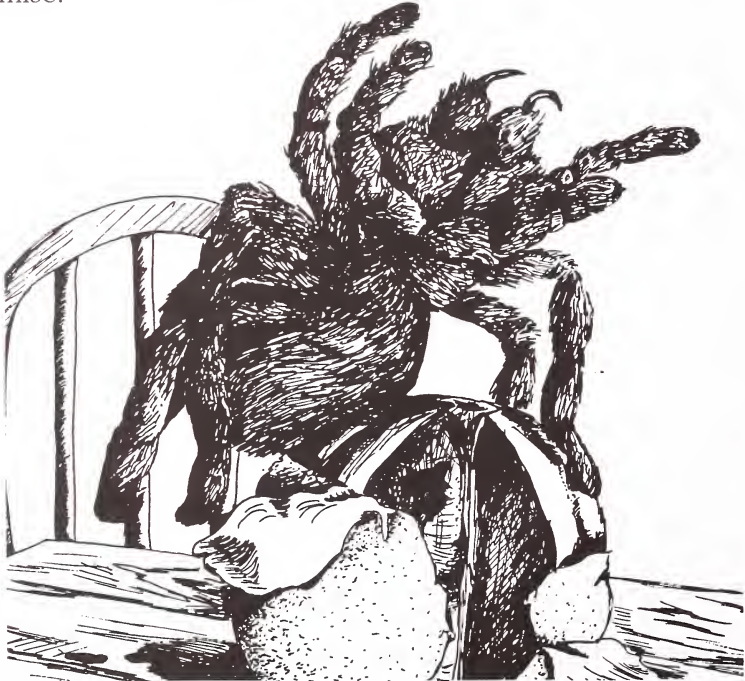
As the midnight hour was at hand the bell tolled, the bell tolled for me and my lady Ligeia. Life had been chosen rather than death by all the residue of the memory of Ligeia. But it was not the choice Ligeia's soul had made, but one that I had selfishly made to summon her return. When people die, their chapter is not torn out of the book of life, but translated into another language and every chapter must be so translated, and for this God employs several translators. It was not God's will to resurrect Ligeia, but my contract with the devil to assure her return to the path she had abandoned.

Ligeia began snarling, lunging, and scratching at me with animalistic behavior rather than that of a human. The ancient Hebrews had regarded the body of the dead as something unclean and not to be touched, and I had committed this moral sin. I had unearthed the evils of sin with my feeble wishes. Alas, had I known the events to follow my obsession with the return of my love, I would have humbly left her soul at rest.

With repeated attacks by Ligeia, I knew I had to put an end to

this madness so I wrestled Ligeia to the floor as gently as I could. The flesh from her body ripped under the grip from my hands and the wild eyes of Ligeia burned holes though my soul. Growling and spitting as a rabid beast, Ligeia damned me to the fiery pits of hell from whence I had summoned her. Dragging her to the bureau, I retrieved a pistol from the lower drawer then placed the barrel to her sunken temple and pulled the trigger. The crimson blood of Ligeia poured slowly onto the floor and with a sharp, rhythmic jerk the corpse of Ligeia lay motionless on the floor.

Her soul may now rest in peace and be saved by the will of God, for it is I who am damned, damned to pay the price for my selfishness. I cannot bear the burden of the loss of Ligeia, not even in the deepest trammels of opium. My heart cannot bear life and my soul has been bought and claimed by Satan in death. As I gazed at the shiny barrel of my smoking pistol as the light from the full moon peeped in the window with its luminosity. The moonbeams danced rhythmically upon the gun's barrel as if it were covered by quicksilver. How comforting the handle felt as I gripped it tightly, the sweat from my hand bathed it. It was the tool to end my suffering, it was the tool of my salvation, the tool of my demise.



*Illustration by Francis Lee*



# On Trucking

Kathrine Howell

At glance, my 115 pound profile certainly doesn't fit the burly, nasty, foul-mouthed category of a truck driver, yet I, myself, was for five years, a truck driver. I drove most often with my husband Dale, sometimes with my sister Virginia.

Both of our husbands had cattle and raised bulls. When they wanted to go to a cattle sale, Virginia and I would take the load. On one such occasion, we had made a trip to Oxnard, California, and unloaded. We had to deadhead back to L.A. to pick up a load of oranges at the Docks, which is the worst place in several states to get to.

The truck we drove was a long nose KW with a walk-in sleeper, double bunks, closets and a refrigerator. The trailer was a forty-eight refrigerated van.

To get into the loading dock, one person had to direct traffic while the driver stopped in the street, blocking both lanes of traffic, in order to have enough room to maneuver into the loading dock.

In California, it seems that everybody is in an angry hurry.

While Virginia directed traffic, I was backing into the dock. People were leaning out their car windows and some were standing beside their cars, shouting obscenities, demanding me to get that #@&\*# piece of junk out of the @#%&\* way.

One man walked toward the Docks, leaving his car door ajar and the motor running. By this time, I was in loading dock number three and Virginia had returned to the truck.

Under the bridge, across the street from the Docks, homeless people lived. One of the black men calmly walked to the unoccupied car, got inside, made a U-turn and was gone.

The owner of the car ran out into the street, shouting for a policeman, almost getting run down by the traffic. He came back to our truck and stepped up on the running board and told me to open that @#\$\$\* door.

Of course the doors were locked, for they locked automatically when the door closed. I told him that he was out of his mind. I wasn't going to open the door.

Virginia was on the CB radio calling the police.

The man said, "Yes, you're going to open this @#%&\* door, it's your @#%\$\* fault that the @#%&\* stole my car."

I said, "You had better get off my truck or I'll blow you off."

The man said, "You punny @#%&\* whore, you're not big enough!

I reached into the side pocket of the door and pulled out a .44 magnum and said, "Am I big enough now?"

The man was so startled that he fell flat on his back, and he didn't say anything else to us.

The police had arrived and I put the gun in my bag. (It is very illegal to carry a firearm in a semi.)

I was sweating because I just knew that Mr. Smart Aleck, owner of the car would tell the police about the gun. While we were being questioned, he kept glaring at me. I ignored him as if he didn't exist. Finally the questioning was over and the police took Mr. Smart Aleck with them.

Of course I appeared brave inside the truck with a gun and while the police were there, but oh, I was scared. No one likes to wait on a load but I was very grateful when the lumber told us that we had to wait on three pallets of oranges. I wanted to get back into the safety of the truck. I was shaking so badly Virginia swears she heard my knees knocking.

The homeless people, who had strangely disappeared while the police were there, were now filing back under the bridge.

Beyond the bridge, construction of some new high-rise was in progress, and the homeless people were gathering left-over pieces of plywood, bent nails and pieces of bisquene. We watched as a young black man and a very young looking girl--with a baby--built their house.

The girl had the baby tied on her back with what looked like an old chenille bedspread. Even with the distance between us, Virginia and I could see how filthy they were.

The couple finished gathering the pieces they wanted and with the sides of their feet, swept an area clean and erected their new home. The boy held the plywood while the girl nailed it, using a stone for a hammer.

The finished product was a three-sided box with a piece of plywood on top for the roof. Then they gathered big stones into a pile.

Virginia and I speculated that they were going to build some kind of fireplace for cooking. They did not. They spread the bisquene around the box and anchored it to the ground with some of the stones. They used the others on the "roof" to hold the same bedspread that held the baby on the girl's back. They were ready to move into their new home, complete with a "door" for privacy.

We saw the girl come out of the house and begin to look for something up and continued her search. We were so intrigued that Virginia got out her camera, attached a lens to it and it became like a pair of binoculars.

The girl was searching for rubber bands! She already had several on her wrist but she searched until she found two more and went back into the house. The bedspread didn't fall completely back into place and we could see the boy holding a cigarette lighter under a blue jar lid.

I assumed that it got too hot to hold because he put it down rather quickly. She had the rubber bands together and while the boy picked up a syringe from the ground, and filled it from the jar lid, the girl tied the rubber bands around his arm. He gave the syringe to the girl and she stuck it in his arm. Then he put the rubber bands around the girl's arm and gave her the rest of whatever was in the syringe. The couple just sort of lay back on the ground inside their new home.

We finally got loaded and it was Virginia's turn to drive. After I signed the manifest, I was putting the load locks on and I thought I heard a baby crying.

The trip home was uneventful but I've wondered so many times what happened to those people. They were already in a bad situation and made it worse by using dope...and what about that baby? It was obvious that it wasn't getting proper care. Did it die from lack of nourishment? Did the couple get so messed up on dope that they forgot and left it somewhere alone? Is the couple dead from an overdose or suffering with AIDS from using filthy needles?

I probably won't ever know but that baby deserved better than what it got in the two hours Virginia and I watched.



## **Times Have Changed**

Francis Lee

Change is inevitable. Everything changes. Mountains change. Seasons change. People change too. My grandmother's one of those people. The transformation of her body and soul is overwhelming. Sometimes, it hurts to look at her and remember that once, behind those cold, filmy eyes, was a kind innocent soul who wanted nothing but to help, to worship and to protect.

I can remember seeing her in her tattered work clothes and headrag. I can see her wiping her brow after a hard day. She worked in the sun a great deal yet her face remained an unblemished, soft brown. She also cleaned houses for the neighbors. She amazed me as she went about her manual labor with such efficiency and swiftness. My little legs swung as I watched her pick fruit and make fresh apple cider. Sometimes she would pick peaches and save a big, juicy one just for me.

I can remember how lovely she looked in her freshly ironed Sunday dresses. She always had a warm smile. And there I am. I can see myself tagging along side of her. I can still hear people saying, "There comes Cousin C'nthia and F'ancis," as we all gathered outside of the church doors. My grandmother was my protector and guide, and I rarely left her side.

I can remember the garden that was her ultimate task ever year. It seemed like miles upon miles to my five-year-old self. She planted rows and rows of tomatoes, corn, okra and my personal favorite, PEANUTS! I hate that garden now. It's old and dried out, like our fun times together. The garden--that's how it all started. The garden--that's what caused the problem. She stubbed her toe in the garden. She had a problem with poor circulation and the wound never healed. It go worse. And worse. And worse. She refused to see a doctor. We pleaded and pleaded with her.

The pleasantness that was Cynthia left and something else grew inside her. It grew until it started to rot away at her, slowly, from the inside out. Then the pain hit, the excruciating pain that made her cry every night. Finally, there was no choice. She was put into the hospital. If she wanted to live, the lower half of her leg would have to be butchered off. I remember going home that night and



crying. We all wanted to avoid the problem. When she lost her leg, a part of all of us was lost.

The grandmother I once knew is gone. Her mind went first and her will power followed. She began to see herself as an embarrassment so we stopped going to church. I don't feel comfortable in a church anymore. I always feel as if something is out of sync. I always feel as if something or someone is missing.

Her pleasantness and warm smiles are gone. The warm brown tone of her skin is gone. All sanity and rationality is practically gone. You may ask, "Well, what's left?" A living being. A person who says cruel things without knowing their impact. Someone who obsesses and possesses everything in her sight. Someone who is small and feeble. Someone who moves through the world blind and uncertain. Someone who must miss out on all the beauty life has to offer.

Honorable Mention MCCCWA



## **Spirit Kin**

Bella Barham-Douglas

*In honor of Walter Inglis Anderson*

1903-1965

On the day I was born<sup>a</sup>  
the little green skiff<sup>b</sup> and you,  
companions in the waves,  
were readying for a voyage to Paradise.<sup>c</sup>

To and fro, you loaded your supplies  
stowing away boxes of can goods, rice and tea;  
while two almost petrified brushes  
balanced behind each ear.

Anticipating the likely threat  
of spring gales in the Gulf<sup>d</sup>,  
you safely secured those things most vulnerable:  
logbooks, new paper, and paints.

Making ready for your trip back to Eden<sup>e</sup>  
in ritual like the father red wing,  
leaving nest and babies behind.  
Fleeing, as though you must

to your island of realizations,<sup>e</sup>  
an encampment for the Alienado,<sup>f</sup>  
at one out there with your spirits of kin  
Cezanne, Quixote, Crusoe and Adam.

Quietly, creation itself  
played its ministerial symphony of acceptance,  
welcoming back its wayfaring guest,  
and offering you freedom of isolation.

Alone to seek with your spirit cousins  
as I do now with you,  
a creative rendezvous of souls:  
the barefoot islander and me.

I should like to ask you then  
if Heaven resembles the one you had here,  
where pelicans nest by the sea  
and pigeons do a feathery love dance.

At home there with your celestial relations;  
you paint with colors never before seen,  
praising the author of life, you say "Holy, Holy,  
Holy"  
this time in chrous with creation.

You are to me now, what their spirits were to you  
in that earthly time of self-preservation.  
You are to me, my spirit kin:  
An artist, an islander, an Alienado.

- a author's birthdate 03/23/65
- b Finding this small boat washed ashore and badly in need of repair, Anderson salvaged the skiff and came to depend on it for many trips to Horn Island.
- c Terms used by Anderson to describe Horn Island.
- d During the last twenty years his life, Anderson spent weeks at a time alone on the Gulf coast barrier islands.
- e Anderson's term for his paintings.
- f "Alienado" was what Anderson termed himself

MCCCWA  
Third Place  
Poetry

## Hot and Cold

Karon Faust Berry

I cherish my world filled with hot and cold,  
Desiring to feel, to see, to hear, and to hold,  
Reaching out to grasp it with hopes of passion  
And hopes of deliverance. Keep out depression,  
Inactivity, and a life that only lives from within.  
My whole being longs to be thrust into life and then  
Feel the cold wind's chill and the hot sun's burning descent.  
Life swells with pleasure, pain, satisfaction, discontentment  
And strife. I crave being a part, cutting a path, making  
A way, and most importantly making a difference. Taking  
Risks to love, to fight, to laugh, to cry and to touch someone.  
My mind sizzles with excitement when these things are done.  
Turn up the heat causing my mind to activate or turn up the cold  
To make my heart inflame with many desires untold.  
I see heartaches and pain which bring with them  
Through time maturity and understanding. Stir up the dim  
Cold night and agitate my soul provoking me to give,  
To feel, to see, to hear, to hold, but mostly to live.

*I used the idea of Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" to write this poem. It contrasts the good, bad, the active, the inactive sides of life along with the desire to feel no matter whether it be feeling good or bad. The idea of being alive and knowing it by feeling happiness or pain.*

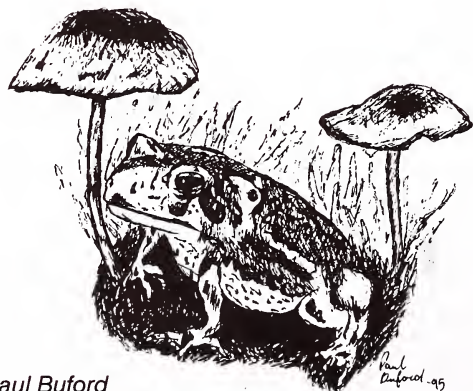


Illustration by Paul Buford



## **Shiloh: The Battlefield of Marriage**

Robin M. Case

“Shiloh,” written by Bobbie Ann Mason, is not about an old battle being retold, but oddly enough is the story of a battle that rages eternal. It is the story of a couple who lose sight of what marriage, especially theirs, is genuinely about. The title leads one to believe he will read about antebellum splendor; however, this is far removed from the common life encountered in “Shiloh.” The characters in this piece are ordinary people with ordinary lives, reflecting many couples today.

Titled after a battlefield and set in a small southern town, you can smell the powder burning from a distant war and feel another looming on the horizon. From the beginning, there are signs of conflict and difficulty between Leroy and Norma Jean. We walk with them through an unplanned pregnancy, a teenage marriage and the death of their child. Yet the fact that they have problems only surfaces, when through a twist of fate Leroy is hurt and they are thrown into each others constant presence. An ocean of differences separates them. Norma Jean blossoms into an independent, free thinking spirit, while Leroy clings to his teenage mentality of life’s big picture. Even when it becomes apparent their marriage is in trouble he is afraid to admit it.

Though this story is fiction it certainly mirrors real life in many ways. Many people enter the marriage relationship with unrealistic expectations of who they and their spouse are, always focusing on today, never looking toward tomorrow. Just as Leroy feels threatened by his wife’s search for herself, many people experience anxiety when they realize their mate is changing. Often it seems they, like a young child’s shoes, are being outgrown. Unfortunately, the characters in this story did not realize change is inevitable. Had they worked on the problems, instead of just ignoring them, they might have made a startling revelation about marriage. It is possible to mature and evolve as individuals and to strengthen their relationship as a couple at the same time. To accomplish this a husband and wife must be willing to talk about their problems. Sometimes it is painful, but the only real solutions are in working through that pain.

I find it hard to separate myself from this work once I read it. It

strikes a nerve with me for several reasons. After Leroy's accident, he is constantly under foot and this drives Norma Jean crazy. When my husband, Dwain, left his job offshore to come home and farm, we had to go through a similar adjustment period. Being together twenty-four hours a day can be a very emotional and trying experience. Likewise, when I first decided to return to college, my husband was apprehensive about what these changes would do to us. Unlike the characters in Mason's story, we compromised so this experience has proved beneficial for our family. It allows me the time to continue my education and gives Dwain more personal time with our children.

This brings me to an extremely important point. Although we have never lost a child, I am sure it is something that takes a long time to work through. This has to be the worst tragedy a couple can face. You can't just pretend it never happened like Leroy and Norma Jean do. A situation of this magnitude is resolved only through many tears and tissues. I think the lack of communication here is the obvious point of breakdown. Similarly, if you monitor the divorce courts of the world, it is possible many of the cases started when people forgot it was necessary to talk things out, discuss potential solutions and reach an agreeable compromise.

In "Shiloh," I see another problem couples face in Mabel, the mother-in-law. Mabel is constantly volunteering her unsolicited advice to the couple about how they should handle their problems. To me she is symbolic of the world that surrounds you. Someone always thinks they have the answers even if they aren't involved in the situation. Mabel probably meant well, but the things that worked for her only make life worse for Leroy and Norma Jean.

In my opinion, Leroy and Norma Jean didn't stay together. The feeling I get from this story leads me to believe they had grown too far apart. His thoughts have been shallow for so long that is hard to imagine him catching up with her. Leroy is quite content until Norma Jean finally finds out who she is and lets Leroy know he isn't a part of her life anymore, if he ever really was. The names of many couples could be substituted in this story providing the same outcome. They marry for the wrong reasons and don't put any effort into the marriage after saying the vows. Married couples, like Leroy and Norma Jean, don't realize marriage is a precious and delicate flower that thrives only under special care. Sadly, Mason's story could parallel the lives of many people today.

# **A Pathway to Understanding**

Karon Faust Berry

While reading Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" the awareness of an elderly woman who has lived an active and challenging life captures my thoughts. However, in her final years her children interact with her as if she were unable to function normally. They will not allow her to actively participate in their lives even though Granny has given wholly of herself to her family. Her daughter and her doctor almost dismiss her presence entirely. In reading Philip Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews" my mind forms an idea that is similar to the one I had when reading Katherine Anne Porter's story. In "The Conversion of the Jews" a child named Ozzie expresses a desire to be heard. His mother and priest dismiss him. Ozzie searches for an answer to a question. He wants to know why his mother and Reverend Binder do not believe that Jesus is actually God's son. He wants them to open up and answer his questions. They do not open up; they refuse Ozzie's invitation. Granny is an elderly woman, and Ozzie is a child. Their ages bring on dismissal. This subject piques my interest because these two individual groups -- the elderly and the children -- possess feelings and ideas that should not be ignored.

Granny Weatherall's name implies that she has weathered all the storms and obstacles in her travels from childhood to maturity. By living and experiencing all of life's challenges, Granny learned many priceless lessons she could pass on to others if allowed the opportunity. Reading this story brought to my mind the realization of the harsh way society treats the elderly. "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" shows this harsh treatment when Granny says "the thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought she were deaf, dumb, and blind." Granny refers to her daughter Cornelia who always talks around Granny to others as if Granny was not in the room. Many times society expresses its feelings toward the elderly in this same way. We ignore their feelings. We forget they are people whose bodies have aged but their feelings and needs remain young and alive. We must seek to reach out and get involved with the person behind the image we see outwardly.

Philip Roth's character's names also seem very appropriate for their roles in "The Conversion of the Jews." They also correspond to my ideas of the way we relate to others. The adult is Reverend Binder, and the child is Ozzie Freedman. We as adults sometimes

want to bind others to our ways of thought and action. Children want to free others by allowing new truths and ideas to surface. They tend to be more open to change and the breaking down of old ways of doing things. The adults in this story will not listen to the child's views. When they look at Ozzie, they see a child and not the person who is inside the young body. Ozzie has ideas and feelings just like the adults, but they do not allow him to express them. Even though a child is not as educated as an adult, he still has a brain that can examine ideas and provide conclusions. Ozzie has a legitimate question regarding Jesus. The adults react as though his thoughts mean nothing and should be ignored. We overlook the fact that children are able to reason and question circumstances. Ozzie, like many children, thinks about everything in an honest, less-biased way than the adults around him. Children do not put as many boundaries around their thoughts as adults. They look at life from a standpoint of openness in which their minds can grasp thoughts and kick them around in their mind until they come up with an idea. Their honest open approach aggravates adults sometimes because adults process their thoughts in a different manner.

In one part of "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," Granny reflects to a time when she was a young girl. She remembers some old love letters she would like to discard so her children will not find them. After reading this, I see Granny as a young girl full of hopes and dreams. Why can't we see this person when we look at her now? We only recognize an old woman. We should open ourselves to see a woman with all the same emotions and experiences we have only inside an older body shell. We must look beyond the outward shell. Granny also remembers that "she had fenced in a hundred acres once, digging the post holes herself and clamping the wires." This statement allows us to see Granny as a vibrant forceful achiever. She took charge of her circumstances and triumphed over them. I like knowing about the woman behind the elderly exterior. The elderly have a wealth of knowledge and compassion within them to share with all who ask. Society should learn to utilize its elderly for their contributions would change us and make us better.

The adults in Roth's story put strict limits on Ozzie's thoughts. They would only listen to thoughts within their narrow boundaries. The author's remarks about the "free-discussion time" allowed by Reverend Binder for the children to express their feelings is actu-



ally a time when “none of the children felt too free.” The children know Binder’s limits. They are intimidated by them. I tend to place limits on my children which stifle their individuality and creativity. We need to learn to talk with our children not just to talk to them. They have input that will help us understand their feelings and needs in their own situations. The adults dismissed Ozzie’s thoughts. By doing this they miss seeing the bright boy honestly seeking to know the truth. They only see a child with a different idea their biased minds will not accept. I see in my life a struggle to keep allowing my children to be themselves. I do not want them to feel like puppets on a string being pulled in my directions only. Children need to be taught; however, they can also teach if we will break down our walls and let them speak freely. I wish to have the openness in my own heart to not bind them but free them allowing them to express their ideas. I want to listen with ears that are not covered with strainers that only allow adult ideas to pass through. Children have a voice and heart which can only grow and prosper when allowed to be expressed.

“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” shows me in many ways I am “jilting” the elderly by not allowing them to give their love to me and in turn returning my love to them. “The Conversion of the Jews” allowed me to see I need to “convert” my closed-mindedness into open-mindedness where elderly and children are concerned so I can reach out to the elderly and the children in the world. These two groups of people on the surface seem different, but in actuality are alike because they are being dismissed without a thought. They are in a separate world kept apart from the rest of us. The time for our worlds to blend is now. By blending our worlds we strengthen all members and bring a better understanding of each other.

Both of these stories send a message to my heart about learning to communicate with others. I realize God shows me the elderly and the children of the world can be used by Him. As in “The Conversion of the Jews” the adults learn that God can speak through a child. We as young adults on our way to becoming elderly adults need to listen attentively for we may hear just the word from God we need through the communications of a child or an elderly person. We bind our minds and hearts when we do not allow the elderly and the children to truly communicate and touch our lives. They are not a burden to be carried, but they should be a pathway through which we can experience honesty, love, under-

standing, and compassion. This pathway can also be a two-way street where we can open ourselves to share with them, and they can share freely with us. We might learn we are more alike than we ever imagined. We just have different looking outer shells. Society has too long looked down on the elderly and the children; I believe it is time to look up.



*Illustration by Tate Nations*

## Kindred Spirits

Bobby Ballard, Karon Berry, Shelley Dunn, Scottie Hailey  
Jana Jasper, Jennifer Pennington, Betsy Phillips, and Laura Smith

### CHARACTERS

Sammy Spencer, a troubled adolescent from John Updike's "A&P"

Mrs. and Mrs. Spencer: Sammy's parents

Mrs. Allgood: Sammy's teacher

Julian, Sammy's older friend from Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge"

Ozzie, young boy from Phillip Roth's "Conversion of the Jews"

Grandmother, from Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Ann Weiss, young mother from Raymond Carver's "A Small, Good Thing"

Miss Brill, seasoned school teacher from Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill"

Antigone, heroine from Sophocle's *Antigone*

Harrison Bergeron, young man from Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron"

Henry, the old drunk from Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well Lighted Place"

Mrs. Turpin, middle-aged woman from Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation"

Narrator, reveals technical information about stories and setting

*Narrator-* This is a fantasy play where the main character is Sammy from John Updike's story, "A&P." Sammy is feeling down because he quit his job to prove a point. He is upset about school. He is also upset about life in general.

### SCENE ONE

Allgood is sitting at her desk. Mr. and Mrs. Spencer come in.)

*Mrs. Allgood:* Hello! I'm glad you could come.

*Mr. Spencer:* I'm glad you called us, but we're not sure why.

*Mrs. Allgood:* If you and Mrs. Spencer will come and sit down, I'll explain.

*Mrs. Spencer:* Please do.

*Mrs. Allgood:* I need to talk to you about Sammy. He has not been turning in the correct assignments. When I allocate a specific type of paper, he chooses to write something totally different. He is always dreaming. I can tell when his mind begins to wander. I realize that it's pretty normal for a

boy his age to daydream, but it's interfering with his school work. I've seen Sammy working at the local A&P; perhaps he is working too many hours. Whatever the problem is, I hope we will be able to resolve it.

*Mr. Spencer:* Thank you for your concern, Mrs. Allgood. We will do our best to work out this issue.

(LIGHT DOWN)

SCENE TWO

(LIGHTS UP) Living Room (Sofa, Table)

*Mr. Spencer:* Sammy! Come down here now.

*Sammy:* Coming, Dad.

*Mrs. Spencer:* Sammy, we just got back from having a conference with Mrs. Allgood.

*Sammy:* (humorous manner) Is she doing all right? Did she have anything interesting to say?

*Mr. Spencer:* Something very interesting. She told us you haven't been doing the correct assignments, it seems you've been writing all kinds of stories.

*Sammy:* Dad, let me explain.

*Mr. Spencer:* I don't want an explanation, first you quit your job at the A&P and now this.

*Sammy:* But-

*Mr. Spencer:* Wait until I finish. I want you to be responsible. Why did you quit your job? Has it been taking up too much of your time?

*Sammy:* Dad, I've explained that before. Lengel had no right to embarrass those girls because they wore bathing suits in the store. And about my school work, I try to do my best, but I begin to think about far off places and dueling characters standing up for what they believe in.

*Mrs. Spencer:* Sammy, you need to get your head out of the clouds and



down to earth. It embarrasses your father and me when we have to be called to your school to find out you are not doing what you are supposed to do.

*Sammy:* (Running to his room, shouting emotionally) You'll never understand!

(LIGHTS DOWN)

<phone rings>

(LIGHTS UP) Sammy sits on bed

*Sammy:* Hi, Julian. I'm so upset. My parents just don't know who I am. They refuse to understand me. they act like they are such cool parents in front of everyone else, but as soon as we get home, they just gripe at me for everything. I didn't want that job anyway, and as far as school goes, who cares. I'm gonna be a famous writer some day and then see if my grades matter.

*Julian:* They're your parents, Sammy. I know it's hard to believe but they're only tryin' to do what they think is best for you. I used to wish that I could have anybody else in the world for a mother. She was loud and opinionated. Now she's gone and I realize that she did the best she could. I got so aggravated because of the way she acted, but she didn't know any better.

*Sammy:* I just think sometimes I am the only person who cares about my writing. Don't they understand that I'm good? It is unjust for me to get F's for my writing. If I don't do the papers just like teachers want them, I make up for it in imagination and detail.

*Julian:* I respect your feelings. I just think you'll have a lot better luck with your parents if you don't get so emotional and dramatic about every little thing. Nobody's saying that you can't write stories, they just want you to do your class assignments.

*Sammy:* But I am emotional about things, especially my writing. My life is going from bad to worse. I used to pray about stuff all the time, now I don't know if God is even real.

*Julian:* Man, I can't help you with that. Maybe one of your characters can give you some insight on that one.

*Sammy:* Oh yeah, like one is going to come in a vision or something. I'm so sure.

*Julian:* Well, I gotta go. Call me later if you get a chance.

*Sammy:* All right, talk to you later.

(LIGHT DOWN)

SCENE THREE

*Narrator:* Sammy always goes to his tree house when he is upset or needs some comfort. Tonight is no exception. Like many other nights in his life, he is lying on his back looking through the window at the stars.

(LIGHTS UP ON INTERIOR OF TREE HOUSE)

*Sammy:* (Talking to himself) I just don't know what to do about my life. I have so many problems and I don't know how to solve them. My parents don't understand me and a lot of the kids at school just think about partying and having fun. I want to grow up and be a man, but I don't know how. Then there are the people at church talking to me about Jesus. I don't know what to do. It's just too much for one kid to deal with.

*Narrator:* Sammy is somewhere between awake and asleep when, all of a sudden, he hears a voice from one of the stars he has been watching. The voice starts to talk to him.

(SMALL LIGHT BLINKS FROM ABOVE STAGE)

*Ozzie:* Hi, my name is Ozzie Freedman. Just call me Ozzie.

*Sammy:* (Stuttering nervously) Hu hu hu Hi.

*Ozzie:* I didn't mean to scare you. It's just, my friends and I were watching you from up here. You've been coming out here every night upset and worried about your life. We wanted to help you but were afraid to come down.

*Sammy:* How did you get up there?

*Ozzie:* It's a long story. Actually, it is mostly short stories but that's beside the point. Let's just talk about your problem right now, OK?

*Sammy:* Well, I guess so.

*Ozzie:* Anyway, we were up there talking about you and decided to take a vote and send some one down to talk to you. I got the short straw so here I am. (LIGHTS FLASH AND OZZIE APPEARS, WITH OR WITHOUT CLOUD-LIKE SMOKE.)

*Sammy:* Who are your friends? Where are they?

*Ozzie:* Let's just stick to your problems for right now.

*Mrs. Turpin:* (Calling from the stars) Hey, Ozzie, I think he needs to know who we all are first.

(Then several voices are heard in a loud mumble, like a fight starting)

*Ozzie:* Hey, guys, stop fighting. We are supposed to be helping Sammy, not confusing him even more. Sammy, I am here with some special people to help you work out your problems.

*Sammy:* Hey, this is weird--what special people?

*Ozzie:* Just relax and don't worry about this being strange.

*Sammy:* OK, I trust you. Who is going to help me and how?

*Ozzie:* My friends are fellow literary characters. First, I am from Philip Roth's "Conversion of the Jews." I know about you quitting your job at the A & P. I can identify with your reason. We kids have to stand up for ourselves and our beliefs. I admire you for "sticking to your guns." I made adults listen to me and so did you. Now I want you to meet Grandmother, from Flannery O'Connor's story, who knows that a good man is hard to find.

*The Voices heard from above in the following scene may be performed as voices with or without spotlights on characters. Or a director may choose to create a flash of light and have characters merge into the scene with Sammy after Ozzie's general introduction. If this option, disregard the stage directions concerning voices coming from overhead.*

*Grandmother:* (Voice coming from overhead, near blinking light) Sammy, I know what you need. You need Jesus. Has He become your personal savior? No, if He were, you wouldn't be looking to us for the answers. Just ask Him into your heart and you'll be all right.

*Ozzie:* Good advice, Grandmother; let's see what Ann Weise from Raymond Carver's "A Small, Good thing" has to say.

*Ann:* (Voice from above) Sammy, it's so good to talk to you. I imagine Scotty to have grown up just like you. I would feel privileged if I could share some of my insights with you. If I can't help my little boy, at least I can try to help someone else.

*Ozzie:* We look forward to hearing you words of wisdom, Ann. We'll come back to you after everyone has introduced themselves. Come on, Miss Brill, don't be shy.

*Miss Brill:* (Voice from overhead) As you know, I'm an observer. I like to people watch; it's amazing what you can learn. Sammy, I know you're confused and hurting. People can be cruel sometimes, even without meaning to. I know, it has happened to me. Katherine Mansfield put me in a painful situation.

*Ozzie:* OK, Antigone, I haven't forgotten about you.

*Antigone:* (Voice from overhead) Sammy, we seem to be kindred spirits. You stood up for what you believed in even though it cost you your job. That is a major accomplishment in your society--

*Sammy:* But I didn't give up my life for the cause like you did.

*Antigone:* Nor would anyone expect you to have done so, things are different for your generation. In my time I felt my brother should have had a proper burial. I stood up for the belief, by burying him, and I suffered the consequences. The only difference in our situations is that I died for my spiritual beliefs and you have an opportunity to work through your conflicts.

*Ozzie:* There is someone else up here who, like all of us, has been controlled by society. He is Kurt Vonnegut's creation, Harrison Bergeron.

*Harrison:* (Voice from overhead) Hi, Sammy, like Antigone, I gave up my life for the cause of freedom. I see you are fighting for the freedom of



creativity. Don't give up, I know you will succeed.

*Henry:* (Voice from overhead) Sammy, things aren't as bad as you think. At least you have friends to help you out. Unlike me, all Ernest Hemingway provided for me was a clean well lighted place.

*Ozzie:* See Sammy, we sympathize with your situation. All of us have gone through a similar struggle. If you will be patient with us I think you might find some comfort and answers through listening to our stories.

*Sammy:* How do you all know about my problems?

*Ozzie:* You've been talking about it for weeks. Every night you come to the tree house and look up to the heavens and ask questions. We've been listening to you, and we finally decided to try to help you. Flannery O'Connor's Mrs. Turpin has a special revelation.

*Mrs. Turpin:* (Voice from overhead) Sammy, we don't have any quick and easy remedies. It was not until someone called me a wart.hog from hell that I realized I was too critical of others. Life is full of questions and all you can do is talk them out. Somewhere deep within yourself is the answer. By talking to others you will begin to bring those answers to the surface. You, alone, hold the answer within your heart.

*Harrison:* (Voice from overhead) Mrs. Turpin is right. Sometimes the world binds us with chains of doubt about ourselves. We begin to believe that the answer can be found outside of ourselves. I was literally a prisoner in chains. Society had told me how I was to be. It was not until I broke free of those bindings that I found the truth, I was special. I had the potential to make my destiny, but I only found those answers within myself.

*Henry:* (Voice from overhead) Being alone can lead to dangerous situations if you have problems on your mind. I once tried to hang myself because I felt the work was too difficult for me. I realize now that you have to reach out to others so you can begin to understand who you are. By expressing your feelings to others you begin to realize that.

*Miss Brill:* (Voice from overhead) Sammy, I was guilty of just sitting back on a park bench for hours watching others live out their lives without really being a help to them. I would listen without really hearing them. I want to reach out to you and help you find solution to your problems.

*Sammy:* Thank you all so much for coming to help me, but I really don't

know where to start.

*Ozzie:* Just talk to us like you've been talking to yourself for these past few weeks.

*Sammy:* I'll give it a try. (Pushing his hair back out of his eyes) I have a lot of trouble talking to my Mom and Dad. It's not that I don't love them or that they don't love me. It's just hard to get them to understand what I am asking them.

*Anne:* (Voice from overhead) I want to tell you a little about my story. It might help you. I had a little boy once, but Scotty was killed in an accident. I think about him all the time. I realize I didn't really talk to him about the thing that were happening to him in his life. I guess I was too busy trying to provide food, clothes, and other things for him. I forgot to provide myself. I forgot to be a part of his life. I believe if you will sit down with your parents and start talking, they will listen. If they don't listen right away, try again.

*Grandmother:* (Voice from overhead) You have to look beyond the exterior of people to see that everyone has a good heart.

*Mrs. Turpin:* (Voice from overhead) Everyone? How can you possibly say that?

*Anne:* (Voice from overhead) No, she's right! When you think of my tragedy and the wonderful man my husband and I met because of our son's death, can't you see her point?

*Mrs. Turpin:* (Voice from overhead) Well, I suppose so. I'm still having trouble breaking my old habits. It's just that sometimes you have to look really hard.

*Grandmother:* (Voice from overhead) Of course, that's true in some cases. When my family and I encountered the misfit, I really blew it. But I continue to hope that my reaching out to him may have changed his life.

*Henry:* (Voice from overhead) Well, there are good people everywhere in the world.

*Miss Brill:* (Voice from overhead) I don't know about everyone else, but I especially see the good in people when they befriend me.

*Anne:* (Voice from overhead) Exactly my point! The baker became our friend because he listened and somehow understood what we were talking about.

*Sammy:* I believe I understand what you are trying to say.

*Ozzie:* I think you've got it now, Sammy. Close your eyes and let the rest of the answers flow in.

*Sammy:* Thank you all so much!

*Narrator:* Sammy sleeps peacefully during the night. He wakes up with excitement. He runs to his room and hurriedly begins writing the story that was assigned to him.

#### SCENE FOUR

(Sammy is proof-reading his paper aloud. As he reads title and the stage directions LIGHTS COME UP and characters begin their lines.)

"Let's Go Together"

Scene opens with an old man sitting at a table. He is alone and drinking brandy. Miss Brill enters the cafe. She goes to the counter.

*Miss Brill:* Excuse me, sir. I would like a cup of coffee, please.

*Waiter:* Will there be anything else with that, ma'am?

*Miss Brill:* No, just coffee. (She gets her coffee and sits in a booth behind the old man. She is slightly startled by a sudden tapping noise behind her.) Oh, you startled me, sir.

*Henry:* I ain't no sir, I just want some more brandy.

(Mrs. Turpin, a heavy set, middle aged woman comes to the table.)

*Mrs. Turpin:* You want some more brandy, Henry?

*Henry:* Yeah, fill'er up.

*Mrs. Turpin:* Ya know this is your fifth one tonight?

*Henry:* Another!

(Mrs. Turpin grudgingly refills his cup.)

*Miss Brill:* (Overhears the conversation and walks over to the table.)  
Pardon me, but that stuff is very bad for you.

*Henry:* What, this? (Holds up cup.) I been drinking this for a long time and it ain't hurt me yet!

*Miss Brill:* Well, excuse me for caring. (She turns to go.)

*Henry:* Wait! Sit down and let me buy you a drink. It will be my way of apologizing.

*Miss Brill:* Well, I'm not sure that is proper.

*Henry:* Oh, sure it is.

*Miss Brill:* No, I better not.

*Henry:* Please, I would really like the company.

*Miss Brill:* All right, there can't be much harm in that. (Miss Brill sits down and they begin to talk.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON BRILL AND HENRY AND LIGHTS UP ON TURPIN AND WAITER.

*Mrs. Turpin:* My, my my, now ain't she just getting friendly all of a sudden.

*Waiter:* Maybe she just wanted to talk.

*Mrs. Turpin:* Naw, she's a floozy. Did you see those fancy shoes she has on? Yep, definitely a floozy.

*Waiter:* There you go with that shoe business again. I'll never understand you.

*Mrs. Turpin:* Well, when I was a little girl, my mama told me that the window to the soul ain't the eyes, it's the shoes.

*Waiter:* Like I said before. (Henry taps the table again.)



*Mrs. Turpin:* I sure do hate it when Henry does that Sometimes he acts like he ain't got the sense God gave a Betsy Bug. (She goes to the table. LIGHTS COME UP.) What is it this time, Henry?

*Henry:* I need two more brandies.

*Miss Brill:* No thanks, Henry, I'll have coffee, please.

*Henry:* Well, I haven't had coffee in a long time. I'll have one myself.

*Mrs. Turpin:* You sure, Henry?

*Henry:* Yep.

*Miss Brill:* Thank you, Henry.

*Henry:* Don't mention it. Why don't you tell me a little about yourself.

*Miss Brill:* There's really not that much to tell. I am a school teacher by profession. I've taught for thirty-three years.

*Henry:* My, that's a long time to be teaching.

*Miss Brill:* Well, as long as I can possibly influence the youth of today, then I will keep on teaching.

*Henry:* I wasn't meaning anything bad. I respect you. That is not easy work.

*Miss Brill:* Thank you. Henry, may I ask you a question?

*Henry:* Sure.

*Miss Brill:* Why do you drink so much?

*Henry:* It's none of your business.

*Miss Brill:* I'm sorry.

*Henry:* No, you couldn't have known. Many years ago, my wife fell ill. I tried everything I could think of to save her, but she still died. I could never forgive myself or forget her, so here I sit drinking to forget my past.

*Miss Brill:* Forgive me for saying this, but if you don't remember the past, then how can you look forward to the future.

*Henry:* I don't. You see, I tried to commit suicide but my niece cut me down.

*Miss Brill:* Oh, Henry, that's terrible.

*Henry:* (Chuckling as he speaks.) That I tried to kill myself or that she cut me down?

*Miss Brill:* You know what I meant.

(LIGHTS UP ON COUNTER.)

*Mrs. Turpin:* Look at her working her feminine wiles on poor Henry. She's got him grinning like a 'possum.

*Waiter:* I think it's good to see Henry smile. I honestly didn't think he had any smiles left in him.

*Mrs. Turpin:* Well, I just think that she is the wrong person for him, that's all.

*Waiter:* If they ask for your opinion, tell them how you feel. If they don't, stay out of it.

(LIGHTS UP ON HENRY AND MISS BRILL.)

*Henry:* What's your story? You seem to be such a chipper person.

*Miss Brill:* A while back, I loved to go to the park. It was like a play for me. Every Sunday I would sit in the park and enjoy my surroundings. One Sunday in particular I got dressed and pulled out my favorite fur. I was sitting on my bench and this rude young man made me realize that I was living in a fantasy. I was alone and was using the park as a place I could feel wanted. I suddenly felt that I didn't belong there.

*Henry:* Well, if you ask me, I don't care what anybody says. You can always belong. All you have to do is want to belong.

*Miss Brill:* Do you really believe that?

*Henry:* I do now, with all my heart.

*Miss Brill:* Maybe I should go back to the park this Sunday. It has been a while.

*Henry:* If I'm not being too bold, why don't we go together? Then neither of us will be alone.

*Miss Brill:* Why Henry! That's an excellent idea. Yes, let's go together.

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

SCENE FIVE:

(LIGHTS UP ON ROWS OF SCHOOL DESKS) (Students may be real or imagined, except for Sammy.)

*Mrs Allgood:* Well, class, as a whole I can't say that I was very impressed with the quality of the papers handed in to me. I felt as if I were reading a bunch of jumbled nonsense in a lot of them. With the exception of one paper, I am afraid most of you are going to be disappointed with your grade. I know I am. I had hoped you would have the opportunity to do some research and become more familiar with the characters who are so important in our world of literature. But I guess I was foolish to....

(BELL SOUNDS AND STUDENTS IMMEDIATELY BEGIN TO LEAVE.)

*Mrs. Allgood:* We will talk about this next class meeting. Oh, Sammy Spencer, would you please see me after class.

*Sammy:* What can I do for you?

*Mrs. Allgood:* Sammy, I wanted to ask you about this paper you handed in to me.

*Sammy:* I'm sorry if its not good enough. I did the best I could and I'm getting tired of you and my parents constantly nagging me about my work. You fuss when I do and you fuss when I don't.

*Mrs. Allgood:* If you will calm down for a minute, young man, I will tell you what I was trying to say. Sammy, your paper was by far the best that was handed in. I believe it may have been the best I have read in my seventeen years as a teacher. I felt that you had actually talked to the characters. You made me believe that you knew them personally.

*Sammy:* (He smiles.) Mrs. Allgood, I really appreciate that. I wasn't sure if I had done the assignment correctly or not. I just sat down and wrote what was in my heart. At first when you talked to my parents I was very angry. I had decided I wasn't going to turn in anything, then I got to thinking maybe I should at least try. Anyway, I was out in my tree house and suddenly I was surrounded by a group of characters from the stories we had been reading. They started talking to me. I was scared until I realized that they only wanted to help me.

*Mrs. Allgood:* Yes, Sammy, many times our dreams seems very life-like. We can even get our best ideas when we are sleeping.

*Sammy:* No, Mrs. Allgood, this wasn't a dream. It was real.

*Mrs. Allgood:* O.K. Sammy, whatever you did, your paper deserves a A. You don't have to make up phone stories about visions. I've already grade your paper.

*Sammy:* But I'm not making it up. That is really how it happened, I promise.

*Mrs. Allgood:* Now, Samuel, I will not have you arguing with me about some foolishness. I have had enough of you this year. I was only trying to tell you how much I liked your paper. There will be no further discussion of this matter, young man. Good afternoon.

(Sammy moves toward the door, his head down.)

*Sammy:* (Straightening up.) You know something, Mrs. Allgood? I learned a lot from doing my paper. You are just like the rabbi in "Conversion of the Jews." No matter what Ozzie said or did, the rabbi always found fault with it. He wouldn't even try to see another way of looking at things. Or what about Creon in *Antigone*? It was either his way or no way at all. Mrs. Allgood, you have taught me a very important lesson. You have shown me the need for reading literature. In our world there are all sorts of people and if we don't read about them we won't know how to deal with them. I needed to read about those characters to learn how to deal with close-minded people like you. Thank you for introducing me to that fact. Have a nice day.

(Sammy leaving the classroom with a bang. Mrs. Allgood looks shocked and slumps down into her chair with a distant look on her face.)

LIGHTS FADE.



# **Don't you know it's a blessing**

Regina Fleming

"Don't you know it's a blessing,"  
whispered Mama, as Reverend Hill finished preaching  
his Sunday sermon. He reached on top of the shiny brown podium  
finding his old white cloth  
to wipe the sweat that rolled down his smoothly shaven face.  
"It's time," said Mama. "Can't wait to hear my Jada."

You could hear a pin drop as Jada  
walked to the front of the church. "It's a blessing,"  
said Jada, "to be in God's house." Suddenly tears rolled down Mama's face.  
"Today we've heard some good preaching,"  
said Jada. Mama quickly reached inside her black leather purse to find a cloth.  
"That girl needs to be behind that podium

not in front." said Aunt Rhodie. "Only the preacher stands behind the podium,"  
said Cousin Edward harshly. "Reverend Hill's our pastor ... not Jada."  
Mama finally found a cloth  
and wiped her gleaming face. "Yes, it's truly a blessing,"  
repeated Jada, "to hear some good preaching."  
"Amen!" shouted the congregation as excitement came over their faces.

"Just look at the glory on that girl's face,"  
said Aunt Rhodie. "Edward, I just know she'll get her chance behind that podium.  
One day that girl's gonna be a preacher.  
I tell ya folks from all around will come to hear our Jada.  
And, when that day comes it'll truly be a blessing."  
"Is that a tear I see?" asked Edward. "Oh tears of joy, quick fetch me a cloth."

Cousin Edward helped Aunt Rhodie find her cloth  
and she quickly folded it to catch the tear rolling fast down her joy-filled face.  
"God said he is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, and that's a blessing.  
Listen to God's word; it's as pure as Pastor Hill's white cloth lying on his podium,"  
said Jada.  
With raised eyebrows, everyone looked at the white cloth, then at their preacher

who suddenly stood up in the pulpit as if ready to start preaching.  
"Don't you know it's a blessing," said Pastor Hill, picking up his old white cloth  
and gently handing it to Jada.  
You should have seen the look on Jada's face  
when Reverend Hill beckoned for her to step up to the podium.  
It was a day to remember, truly a blessing.

"When I was about your age, not yet a preacher, my pastor looked into my face,  
held this very white cloth," said Pastor Hill, "and stood at this same podium.  
It's time I pass on the tradition, Jada, and now you shall pass on the blessing."

## Literary Hall of Fame

Born to Mary and Sam Carruth, I am a native of Brookhaven, Mississippi, and I attended Brookhaven High School through the eleventh grade. The summer before what was to have been my senior year, I applied to Copiah-Lincoln Community College and was accepted into the freshman class. While at Co-Lin, I was a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the choir and Sojourners, served as associate editor of *Wolf*



Molly Carruth Mandel

*Tales*, and received the Journalism and Spanish awards my sophomore year. I earned my Associate's degree from Co-Lin in 1972.

I was graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Louisiana State University in May 1974 and immediately went to work for the *Brookhaven Daily Leader*, covering "mule-footed" hogs, giant rattlesnakes and industrial development. The tragic fire at Moore's Rest Home, which killed six residents one dark morning, was my first "big" story. It lead to my one-and-a-half-year stint at the Jackson *Daily News*, where I covered the police, fire and City Hall beats. While covering City Hall, I also donned the hat of assistant city editor, however briefly. My coverage of the trial of the man accused of the slaying of *Daily News* arts editor Frank Hains, my neighbor and my good friend, opened the door to my being hired by United Press International's New York Bureau in the spring of 1976.

While at UPI, I worked as a general assignment reporter for the

“local desk,” which covers the New York metropolitan area and produces 24-hour reports for newspapers, television and radio. I interviewed the likes of Roy Rogers and countless other celebrities, followed the Son of Sam serial killings from their start, covered numerous shocking local murder trials, fired out bulletins on the slayings of notorious mobsters, and wrote features on just getting by in New York City.

Soon, I was assigned to City Hall, where I remained for three years, mostly listening to Mayor Ed Koch complain and pontificate at his daily news conferences. While working in the famous “Room 9” at City Hall, I joined the Inner Circle, a group of past and present political reporters who present annually a charity song-and-dance show roasting New York’s politicians and power brokers. I served briefly on the club’s executive committee and over the years, sang a solo or two during the annual lampoon.

In 1983, I accepted the city editorship of the local desk and a short time later, married a most wonderful man I had met while taking country-western dance lessons near my Greenwich Village apartment. At the time I accepted the job as city editor, I was told that an informal survey of all the major news organizations in the city showed that I was the first woman to ever hold the title alone. (And as they say in New York, that and a buck and a quarter will get you on the subway.)

By 1984, married life and new responsibilities as a step-mother to a teen-aged daughter necessitated our moving from Manhattan to Long Island. The prospect of long hours commuting to the city and, more importantly, the recent sale of UPI prompted my decision to resign.

Since then, I have lived the life of suburban dilettante, taking art classes, remodeling my home, dabbling in real estate, playing golf, skiing, and occasionally working as an office temporary.

As for my writing life, a juvenile book about a physically challenged cat and two dogs enduring life in the Piney Woods of Mississippi silently awaits calmer days and a clearer head.

I am grateful to be recognized by my alma mater in this way. I have such fond memories of my time at Co-Lin, and this award serves to warmly remind me of the good and caring people who were so instrumental in launching my writing career.

## **The Utility Room**

Edna Earle Crews

Clipping shears lie rusting  
near broken jars, bags of Sevin dust,  
and time-release fertilizer.  
Hoes, shovels, and a double-sided axe  
stand at attention near the corner,  
guarding the gas weed whacker  
and the electric leaf blower.  
Lazy wasps and dirt daubers hover    watching  
as we push past our garden supplies,  
searching for boxes filled with Christmas  
bells, bows, tinsel garland, and angels.  
We'll return to the garden    in the spring  
armed with shears, shovels, and garden dreams.



## **The Tear**

Phyllis H. Lanier

I had made the tear fall from her darkened face -  
Small and perfect shape was the tear  
around and under her eye.  
I saw the tear, moist as mine,  
falling on her dark soft face.  
She was black and I was white -  
but the tear was the same.  
Now knowing how she cared, too,  
for the dying and twisted body before us,  
Realizing I had made a mistake,  
and remembering still, the small, perfect-shaped tear  
on the dark soft face.

September 14, 1994

# *Road*

## **Those Teachers: Written between Austin, Texas, and Crystal Springs, Mississippi**

Edna Earle Crews

In the fifties     like tall oaks  
those teachers cast  
shadows on us all  
converting our young dreams  
sheltering our hopes  
and showing us ways to send our roots  
into diverse directions.

In memories they seldom age  
but wear forever their youth,  
ageless branches supporting  
young birds ready for flight.

## **Lines Written on I-70, East of Kansas City**

Shane Wallis

My hands press against the windshield  
silhouetted by moonlight  
on the other side.  
I lie staring up amidst the night's beacon:  
The moon just hangs,  
providing no warmth,  
little light in the twisting  
gray-white sky that spills over with  
dreams and hopes of forgotten pioneers.  
And I am the color called shadows  
while distant flickering of far off  
lumens scatter the horizon.

# *Poems*

## **Your Favorite Color: After Visiting Longue Vue Gardens, New Orleans**

Phyllis Lanier

In  
the  
garden

We  
saw  
yellow

Your  
favorite  
color

Yellow  
I  
mispelled

In  
third  
grade

Yellow  
Yellow  
Yellow

## **Momma's Secret Remedy**

Tara Reynolds

It bothered me every time I went through my momma's bedroom. It was that little metal container on the table beside her bed. I probably would not have noticed it so much or have been bothered by it if Momma had not repeatedly told me never to touch it.

The reason, she said, was because it contained a "secret remedy" from her mother, and since she had no way of refilling the container, she was afraid that if I ever picked it up that I might accidentally break it and spill its valuable contents.

The container was not really much to admire. It was so old that the once bright golden painted flowers were now faded yellow and chipped. You could tell right where it had been gripped again and again as the container was lifted and its tight lid pulled off.

Not only Momma's fingers had gripped it there, but her mother's and her grandmother's, too. Momma did not know for sure, but she felt perhaps her great-grandmother had used this same container and its "secret remedy."

All I knew was that when Momma got married, her mother had brought the container to her and told her to make the same loving use of its contents as she had.

I never saw Momma start her day without taking the container off her table and swallowing some of its contents. Even when she was feeling bad, I saw her take just a little out of the container before she started to get dressed. Whatever was in that container, it sure worked because I noticed that Momma would be in a better mood. I was not alone in my opinion - anyone who talked to my momma noticed how friendly she was.

But why would she not let me touch that little container? Was she really afraid I would spill its contents? And what did that "secret remedy" look like? It was so fine that whenever Momma took some of it, I could not tell if it was a liquid, powder, or pill. She obviously had to use very little of it because there was no way of refilling the container.

Then one day Momma went out of town, where she was going to stay overnight. When I returned home from school that afternoon, I found the house extremely lonely. As I wandered through her bedroom to put up clothes, I saw the little metal container

sitting on her table. My eyes were drawn to it like a magnet - I quickly looked away, but curiosity drew me back.

What was in the container? Why was I not to touch it? How much of it was left? I looked away again and opened the closet door. I started to hang the clothes up, however, my eyes went back to the container again. What would it hurt if I looked inside? Why was Momma so secretive about that container, anyway?

I hung up some more clothes and debated to myself - should I or should not I? After I finished hanging up all the clothes, I could no longer resist.

I walked slowly across the room, and ever so carefully took the container off the table, fearing I would spill it while taking a peek.

I set the container on the bed, and carefully pried off the lid. I was almost scared to look inside. When the inside of the container came into full view, my eyes opened wide - why, the container was empty, except for a little folded sheet of paper at the bottom.

I reached down for the paper and carefully picked it up by a corner. I removed it and slowly unfolded it under the lamp.

A brief note was scribbled inside, and I immediately recognized the handwriting as that of my grandmother's. It simply said, "Start off your day with a smile, because God loves you!"

I swallowed hard, replaced the note and closed the container. Now I could understand why Momma was always in such a good mood after she opened that little metal container.

First Place, Short Story  
Lawrence County High School





## **A Mother's Hands**

Mindy Herrington

No sun shone in the gray winter sky as Danielle gently lay a bouquet of flowers on the hard, cold ground. Lost in emotion, she did not notice as the chilling February wind whipped through her long raven tresses and sent shivers down her small framed body. Danielle stood on the side of the hill gazing at the slate gray marble marking her mother's grave. She remembered the people at the funeral whispering, "So young to lose a mother and a father, only 15"; "What a scandal for the family"; "What will the girl do now?"

Danielle's mind traveled swiftly over the memories she had of her mother. She remembered hearing about how beautiful her mother was when she was younger, before she got married. To Danielle, the most beautiful thing about her mother was her hands. They were hands that caressed and did not hit, they were soft and did not hurt, hands that were loving and did not inflict pain. Danielle's mother was a kind, soft-spoken woman with a gentle way about her.

Danielle was wrenched from her memories as the sound of a car on the lonely road by the cemetery reached her. Her eyes wandered to the ground above her mother's grave and as she thought of her mother's hands surrounded by the cold, unfeeling earth, a solitary tear rolled down her pale cheek. She stared at the date on the headstone - January 6, 1993, exactly one month ago. Danielle remembered every detail of that day. She had worn a faded green sweater and jeans to school. For lunch she had a ham and cheese sandwich. She walked home from school with Jennifer to work on their English project. She liked Jennifer's house. It was quiet and peaceful.

It was about 5:30 when Danielle heard the wail of the ambulance's siren. She and Jennifer watched it turn into the driveway three houses down . . . her driveway! Danielle had a vague sense of running. While she ran, she noticed two police cars parked in front of her house. As she reached her house, two paramedics brought out a gurney with a covered body lying on it. She watched silently as they wheeled it by her. Slowly, as if in a dream, Danielle made her way through the small crowd that had

gathered around her yard. Then she saw him. There was blood on his shirt and on his handcuffed hands. No! she screamed as she ran towards him. One of the policemen standing beside him caught Danielle and dragged her away as she kept screaming, "Murderer! You killed her!"

Danielle's tears flowed freely and sobs racked her body as she threw herself on the small mound in front of the tombstone. "Oh, Mother, it's my fault. I should have been with you," she cried as her tears made mud out of the red clay beneath her head.

Danielle was taken to the police headquarters. Her only relatives, Uncle Bill and Aunt Marian who lived in a town forty-five minutes away, had been called and were on their way. For a little while the police, busy with other things, did not bother her. Then the policeman who had held her back at the house asked if she was up to answering some questions. Danielle said she would try.

It was in a tiny room at police headquarters that she told all of the secrets that she had kept bottled up inside of her. In that room with the dull brown walls, Danielle told the police chief and Officer Riley, the policeman from the house, of the years she spent watching her father abuse her mother. She told in a quiet trembling voice of how some of her earliest memories were of her father yelling at her mother. As the years went by, the yelling turned to slapping and slapping to punching. Danielle recalled when she was ten; she had seen her father push her mother and had tried to stop him. Her father slapped Danielle so hard she fell down. She had fled the room crying. That night her mother came into her room and warned Danielle never again to interfere in the arguments that mommy and daddy had. After that, Danielle no longer tried to stop the abuse, but she couldn't stay and watch it, either. She would make up excuse after excuse to stay away from her house. That was one of the reasons she was at Jennifer's house that day.

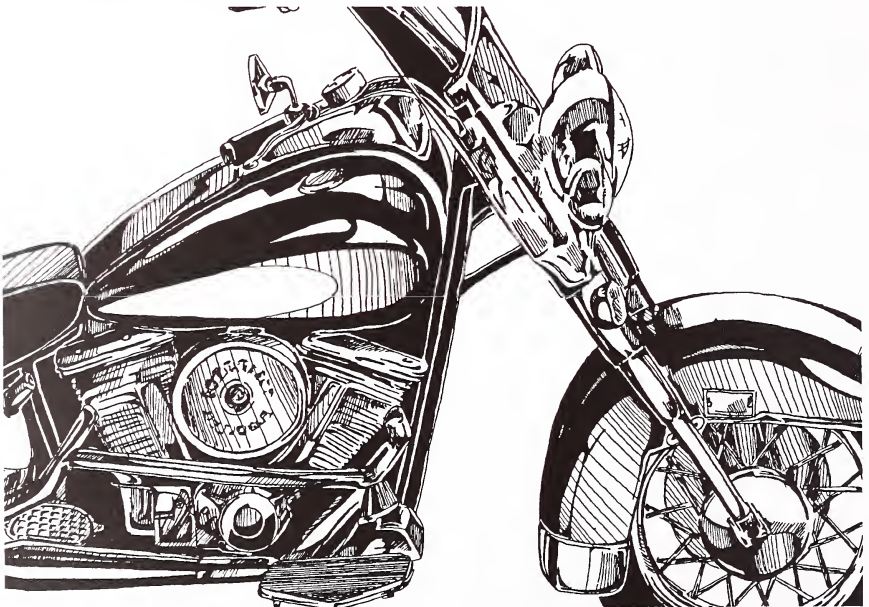
Danielle asked the police to tell her exactly how her mother died. Officer Riley said in a gentle voice that they did not have the autopsy complete, but the paramedics thought it was because of a severe concussion caused by many blows to the head. Danielle did not have to ask what hard object had hit her mother's head.

Danielle had finished giving her statement when her aunt and uncle arrived to get her. As she walked out of the small room, she

saw him. She stopped abruptly and her gaze fixed on his hands . . . hands that hit and did not caress, that hurt and were never soft, hands that inflicted pain and did not know the meaning of love. As her eyes met his, the rage there made him take a step backwards. Then Danielle turned and left.

She sat beside her mother's grave, hoping that her mother had found at last the peace she deserved. There would be a trial. Danielle would probably have to testify. Whatever the outcome, she would never have to see that monster again. Her aunt and uncle wanted her to live with them. They are a nice couple who have a home where Danielle believes she can find some measure of happiness. "Mother, I will always love and remember you." Danielle looked at her own hands, so much like her mother's. She squeezed her eyes shut to block out the pain of remembrance, only to have her eyes widen in physical pain. Her fingers softly touched the bruise underneath her eye. Her boyfriend Richard had lost his temper again on their date last night. The resemblance of hands is not the only trait Danielle and her mother share.

Second Place Short Story  
Lawrence County High School



*Chad Calcote, illustrator*

## Together

Amanda Turner

The young man waits in a small, dimly lighted room down the hall. He looks around impatiently, and notices how white the walls and ceiling look. He thumps on the arm of the large wooden chair. He listens to the voices down the hall. The room is hot and the air is stale and tense. Running his fingers through his thick brown hair, he notices the perspiration forming just above his eyebrows.

He can hear the footsteps coming down the hall, and then pausing at the door. He can't quite make out what they are saying, the tone of the man's voice is firm, yet not harsh. The last sentence is heard clearly by Marc who is straining so hard to listen that he can hear his own nervous heart beating in his chest.

"You may want to consider abortion."

The woman's voice, soft and full of pain, almost whispers, "Thank you, doctor."

Marc stands quietly, trying to take in the unspeakable truth he has just heard. A young woman with a silent stare opens the door and looks in on Mar, who has tried to keep from looking overly anxious.

"So, what did the doctor say?"

"Let's go."

"Lindsey, what did he say?"

"Please, we'll talk about this in the car." Agreeingly, he picks up his coat and walks to the door. They say nothing as they walk down the steps of the clinic.

At the door of his blue Honda, he looks at her almost pleadingly and asks again even though he knows the answer. "Lindsey, are you pregnant?"

"Yes, okay? Are you happy now? Are you so ready to learn of the child you are going to abandon if I don't get rid of it?"

"I never said I wanted you to get rid of the baby if you were, you know."

"What, Marc, that I'm pregnant? Why do you have such a problem with that word? See, you are already denying this."

"Why are you so mad at me? All I want is the best for you. Why won't you let me talk to you? This is my baby, too."

No, this is a mistake. This is a mistake that is growing inside of

me, not a baby."

"So what do you want me to say?"

"Don't say anything. Just take me home." He drives to her small apartment. He kills the car and looks over at her. "Thanks for the ride. I'll call you sometime tonight."

"Don't you think we should talk now?"

"No. I have to do some thinking. We'll talk tonight."

He watches her as she runs up the sidewalk, fumbles and curses the keys, and goes inside: never looking back.

"Hello?"

"Marc, I've decided to give up the baby."

"What?"

"You heard me. I think it's the best thing to do. And after everything is taken care of, I'm moving back home to Denver.."

"Lindsey, please think about this. I want you to stay. I want you to marry me and have this baby, and maybe, someday, everything will work itself out. Please, listen to me."

"I know what I'm doing. You'll thank me later. I don't want you under these circumstances. I'll be blamed in the long run. Just forget about me, forget about the baby, and forget us."

"I don't want to lose you, Lindsey. I love you."

"I love you, too. That's why I'm doing this. Good-bye, Marc." Dropping to his knees with the receiver still dangling in his hands he weeps on the floor as the sound of the dial tone fills the room.

"Marc, you will never guess who I saw yesterday."

"Who?"

"Lindsey."

"You're kidding. Where. Where?"

"In Denver. I went up to see my kid brother."

"Well, how did she look?"

"Fat."

"What do you mean?"

"She's pregnant, Marc. She never gave up that baby."

"Wait a minute. This must be wrong. Lindsey gave up that baby. That's why she moved back to Denver."

"No, she told me she moved back to Denver to raise her baby with her family there. She said she didn't want to ruin your life by forcing you into marriage like that."

"Oh, my God. I've got to go."

"What are you going to do?"



"I gotta go find my baby."

"You better hurry. She said she was ready to pop any day now. Her due date was last week."

"Okay. Thanks, Robert."

"Could you show me to Lindsey Carter's room, please?"

"Are you friend or family?"

"Family."

"Okay, sir, right this way." He thanks the nurse as she left him standing at the door. As he peeks in the room, he sees the worried expression on her young face and the outline of her body under the thin, cold sheets.

"Lindsey?" He called as he walks over to her bed.

She sits up and stares at him speechlessly.

"Look, Lindsey. Robert told me all about you and the baby. I understand. Listen, don't say anything, just hear me out. I thought about this all the way up here, and I realized that I can't live without you. These past few months have been pure torture. I haven't been able to look at another girl without seeing your face and regretting the day you walked out of my life. I want you to marry me and I want to be this baby's father, and I promise I will try my very best to make us into a family. I've got a good job back home and I want you to come back with me. I want you to be my wife. I want to wake up every morning and see your sleeping body next to me. I want to look over and see our beautiful baby in the crib next to the bed. What do you say, Lindsey, will you give me another chance to make you happy?"

"I don't know. This is too sudden for me."

"Please, I can't live without you."

Oh, God, Marc, I can't live without you, either. I couldn't stop thinking about you. I want to be with you and raise our baby, too." They embrace as they have done before.

"I love you, Lindsey Carter."

"I love y . . . Oh, God , Marc, call the nurse!"

"What's happening?"

"We're going to have a baby, Marc. Together."

Third Place, Short Story  
Lawrence County High School

## **Memories**

Christopher Rowe

Memories are heartbeats  
Sounding through the years.  
Echoes never failing  
Of our smiles and our tears.  
Moments that are captured,  
Sometimes unaware.  
Pictures in an album  
Or a lock of hair.

Images that linger  
Deep within the mind.  
Bits of verse we cherished  
Once upon a time.  
Through the musty hallways  
of the days we knew.  
Ever comes the vision  
Beautiful and true.

Memories are roses  
Blooming evermore.  
Full of fragrant sweetness  
Never known before.  
Life must have a reason,  
Goals for which to strive.  
Memories are lights that burn  
To keep the heart alive.

**First Place Poetry**  
**Mendenhall High School**

## **Death Came Knocking**

Lana Bull

Dark are the clouds that are flocking,  
A melancholy feeling to create.  
The stranger comes knocking.

The invading sound is mocking,  
Reminding her of the emptiness of life's plate.  
Dark are the clouds that are flocking.

Her tired eyes start dropping,  
Unknowing of their fate.  
The stranger comes knocking.

The wind sets the trees rocking,  
Their branches threatening to break.  
Dark are the clouds that are flocking.

Her fear never stopping,  
Her life dwindling at an amazing rate.  
The stranger comes knocking.

The wind's song seems to be dropping  
And her life has come to date.  
When the dark clouds were flocking  
And the stranger came knocking.

**Second Place Poetry**  
**Lawrence County High School**

## **The Special Place**

Carrie Channell

There is a place where people go,  
Far beyond the stars.  
A place where darkness is obscured  
By all things that give light.  
All sadness is forgotten here  
And laughter goes unbroken,  
For here there is no need for sorrow;  
No one is in pain.  
Mercy and grace are given freely.  
Love knows no restraint.  
There is no other place around  
That is like this anywhere.  
A person can only find this peace  
If they're heaven bound.

**Third Place Poetry**  
**Lawrence County High School**

## **The Tragedy of Claudius, King of Denmark**

Dara Callender

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, Claudius is a character who is neither purely evil nor purely good. Claudius does, however, have a fatal flaw that eventually leads to his death. He is power hungry, and in his pursuit of the crown his ambition leads him into evil activities. Claudius is not purely evil because not even he can stand to let Gertrude drink the poison intended for Hamlet. Whether this is because he loves her or not, it still shows a moral side of Claudius. Claudius does not undergo a character change throughout the play; therefore, he is a flat character. For these reasons Shakespeare's play could be named *The Tragedy of Claudius, King of Denmark*.

The underlying flaw of Claudius in the play is his ambition. First of all, his overwhelming desire for power drives Claudius to kill his brother the King. Secondly, his ambition leads him to commit incest with his brother's widow Gertrude. Later in the play, he plans twice to have Hamlet killed in order to ensure that his plans as King will be successful. The tragedy comes when Hamlet discovers the ambition of Claudius that led him to kill his father. The same flaw that compelled Claudius to plan to commit murder will ultimately be the cause of his death.

Near the end of the play, a different side of Claudius is seen - a very humane and cautious side. Claudius can't stand the thought of his innocent Queen dying from the poisonous drink intended for Hamlet. In trying to stop her, he shows his concern, if not love, for Gertrude. This side of Claudius is concerned about someone other than himself. Claudius even shows a little sympathy for Gertrude because of her ignorance in the situation. Here we see that Claudius is not entirely wicked.

Claudius does not undergo a character change in the play. Throughout the play, the power-hungry side of Claudius remains dominant. He never shows realization that his ambition has led to his demise, nor does he repent from his ways. His desire to be king overrides any other emotions he may possess, even his apparent concern and love for Gertrude. Because he never realizes his mistakes or undergoes character change or growth, Claudius is a flat character.



Claudius is a key character in Shakespeare's play. His character flaw is essential to the plot of the story because it is Hamlet's cause for becoming vengeful. All other events in the play hinge on Hamlet's attitude of revenge. However, a different side of Claudius is seen in his human affection for Gertrude. Had Claudius realized his deadly characteristic within himself and turned from this way to grow as a person, the eventual tragedy would have been avoided, and Claudius would have been a round character. As the play is, he never recognizes this, and thus, he is destroyed by it.

First Place Literary Essay  
Brookhaven High School



## Gatsby's Time

Natalie A. Seals

Time is a immovable force that has never changed and never will. Through the centuries, man has tried with all the technology it could muster to defeat this ever advancing enemy but has never succeeded. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* tells the story of Jay Gatsby, a man who fought a battle to overcome the ravages of time and relive a well-forgotten past but failed. Fitzgerald uses Gatsby to reveal the never-ending, yet vain, struggle of man to control time.

The narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway, describes Gatsby as having an "extraordinary gift for hope" (6). This gift is the driving force behind Gatsby's efforts to win the heart of his lost love, Daisy Buchanan. Although five years have passed since the two were together, Gatsby believes that he can "repeat the past" (116) and "fix everything the way it was" (117).

Through patience and planning, Gatsby finds his dream within his grasp with a meeting with Daisy. He reminds Daisy that it has been "five years next November" (92) since their last meeting, without a moment's hesitation. This practice of keeping a strict record of time has been one of the ways Gatsby tried to control time. He kept strict schedules on when to awaken, and what to do during his days even as a boy, as well as lists of things not to do during the day (181). This meeting does not start Gatsby's dream, but it puts into motion the circumstances which end his life. Gatsby himself calls the meeting a "terrible, terrible mistake" (92).

Gatsby refuses to realize the start of his inevitable downfall; his "gift" (6) will not let him. He simply remains clutched to "some last hope" (155) of making things the way they once were. He believed that he could control his future, by reliving the past. Even if this future seemed to allude him, he would "run faster...stretch out his arms forever..." (189) until he reached his goal. His dream ends forever when a madman takes his life.

Nick feels the utter defeat that Gatsby must have felt at Daisy's rejection after Gatsby's death. He was defeated by time, as was Gatsby, and Nick feels that we merely "beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (189), a past which can never be changed, nor lived again.

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Second Place Literary Essay  
Wesson Attendance Center

## Arthur's Education on War

Stephanie McDonald

According to T. H. White in *The Once and Future King*, Arthur Pendragon, who is King Arthur, has an interesting childhood. White paints a vivid picture of Arthur's education in Forest Suavage. Arthur is taught by Merlyn, who gives good lessons. Arthur tries to remember them and follow Merlyn's advice. Despite Merlyn's guidance and Arthur's determination to do right, things just do not seem to work out the way Arthur has planned them.

One of the first experiences Arthur has is as a perch. Merlyn takes him to meet the king of the moat. Mr. P. Arthur learns from Mr. P. that Might is Right. Mr. P. says, "Power of the body decides everything in the end, and only Might is Right" (52). Arthur, of course, disagrees with this view of life. When Arthur becomes king, he comments on this, "I don't think things ought to be done because you are *able* to do them. I think things should be done because you *ought* to do them" (246). Therefore, Arthur comes up with a great plan to make might work for right. It is a splendid plan, and Arthur enthusiastically tackles the problem. In the end Arthur finally realizes that the world is just not ready for such a change. He learns that wars are fought for the same reasons they have always been fought, might wants to be right.

Merlyn is always giving Arthur advice on war. At one time he tries to explain to Arthur that there is only one reason for war. As he, Arthur, and Kay are riding one day, Merlyn says, "There is only one good reason for fighting--and that is, if the other man starts it" (232). Later, Arthur thinks he understands what Merlyn has been trying to teach him. Arthur gives the question of starting a war much thought. He deducts,

A good reason for starting a war is simply to have a good reason! For instance, there might be a king who had discovered a new way of life for human beings--you know, something which would be good for them. It might even be the only way of saving them from destruction. Well, if the human beings were too wicked or too stupid to accept his way, he might have to force it on them, in their own interests, by the sword. (266)

Merlyn knows that Arthur has missed the point of all of the things that Merlyn has tried to teach him. Merlyn tries to clear up

the misunderstanding with a reference to Jesus Christ, "On the contrary, he made it clear that the business of the philosopher was to make ideas *available* and *not* to impose them on people" (267). Even so, Arthur has no choice but to fight for his ideals.

All of Merlyn's teaching is for naught. Somehow the wonderful idea of using might for only right becomes muddled. War after war is fought and the great ideal is never realized. Arthur dies a dissatisfied old man. To the end, Arthur is optimistic; he hopes that someday might will be used for right.

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Third Place Literary Essay  
Wesson Attendance Center



# **The Water Fountain**

Natalie A. Seals

Do you remember when your one and only goal in life was to be in the sixth grade? I certainly do! I was in the second grade, and I looked up with awe at those sixth graders. They could do long division with their eyes closed and they even bought their own lunch. Everyday as my class came in from recess and lined up at the water fountain, they'd go by. They looked so tall, walking by talking about all sorts of things that second graders just didn't understand, like working equations and what comes on TV. after 8:30. Sixth graders were the ultimate in elementary. Even after waiting thirty minutes for your teacher to finally let you go to the water fountain, you would happily give up your place in line to a sixth grader.

Then, before I knew it, I was in the sixth grade, but I did not feel any older. Everywhere I looked, there were people who were so much bigger and so much smarter than I was. I felt just as small as ever. I really did not feel that I had grown up as much at all. And do it was for years, the bigger I got, the smaller I felt, because there were always people just a little older and a little smarter than me around, I believe that most people have felt that way at least once in their life, though.

In this fast-paced world of cellular phones and fax machines, a person can easily become discouraged. Everywhere you look, you see people who have more money than you or faster cars than you, and you feel small again like a second grader. Your spirit gets weighed down, and you need a little refreshment. I find my refreshment in that little hallway where I first started elementary at the water fountain.

Remember how wonderful that water fountain was? If your best friend across the hall happened to walk by the door, it was the perfect excuse to get up and go see what she wanted. And after thirty minutes of kiss chase, a big drink from that water fountain, could refresh you like nothing else. I just loved that water fountain, and once when I was a junior in high school, it came to mean much more to me.

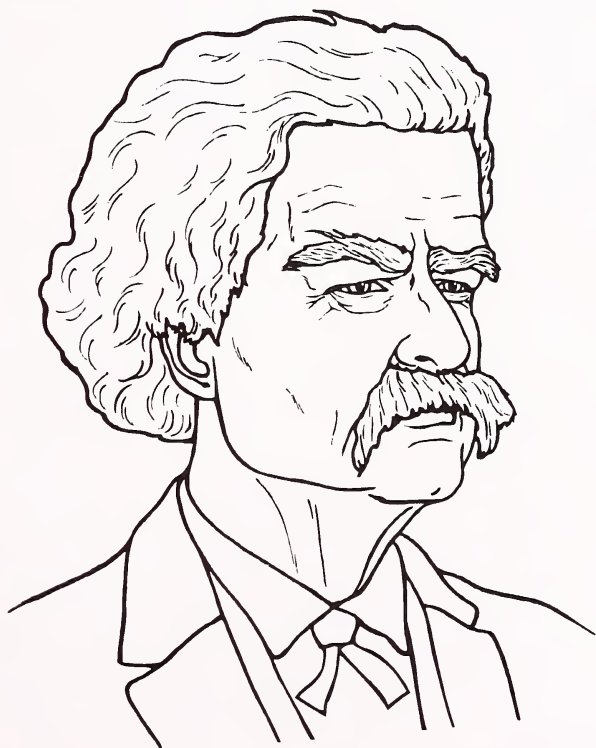
While visiting my old school to watch a program, I decided to visit my old classroom. I saw that water fountain and just had to



get a drink. As I bent over, something dawned on me. I was bending over that same water fountain that I used to stand on tiptoe to reach! I began to think about all of the growing I had done over the years, and realized I had grown a great deal. Perhaps I would always be faced with people who were bigger and smarter and more sophisticated than I was, but nobody had the right to tell me that I was not grown up. I had matured into an intelligent, young woman, and I was ready to take on the world.

So as you pass through this world and begin to feel small and insignificant, find a water fountain, remember the way you stood on tiptoe to reach it before, and drink -- it will refresh your soul.

First Place, General Essay  
Wesson Attendance Center



# **Governments and Economics**

Stefanie McDonald

Since many of the questions people pose about the economy are so controversial, many turn to governments to answer these questions. Thus, these questions are considered both political and economic. The following are the three main classifications of political and economic systems: capitalism, socialism, and communism. Of the three, capitalism is the most fair and gives the best opportunity for happiness.

The definition of capitalism is "economic system based on private ownership of the means of producing goods and services and upon private initiative, competition, and profit." By this definition, capitalism is not a political system in itself. Democracy is the political system that must be practiced in order for capitalism to work. Democracy is defined as "system of government in which supreme authority rests with the people; may be direct where the people make public policies by their votes, or representative, where the people choose public officeholders to act in their behalf." The basic ideas that democracy is based on are simple. Throughout democratic countries, it is recognized that there is underlying worth and dignity of each and every person. People in general have respect for equality of all persons. A strong faith in majority rule, but with an insistence on minority rights, prevails. The theory that compromise is a necessity is accepted. This gives the people the widest possible area of individual freedom. Capitalism comes from the belief that people (as individuals and not as an ignorant mass) are able to conduct economic affairs with very little government intervention. Since all people are individuals, this is an ingenious doctrine.

Socialism is another economic/political system. It is an "economic system based on public (collective, social) ownership of the means by which goods and services are produced, distributed, and exchanged." The early socialist theory is called "private socialism." They thought that this type of economy could rise out of and be managed by voluntary private action. Government action would not be necessary. State socialists imagined that this could not take place without government intervention. Evolutionary socialists maintain that socialism be slowly and peacefully introduced to the nation by working within the guidelines of the established government. All thought that there need be no private ownership of any-

thing. It should all belong to and be run by the government. Socialists believe that this provides for the equal distribution of wealth and opportunity among all people. Individual initiative and competition are thought to be unimportant. This system allows for no chance of advancement for hard workers. In effect, it promotes shoddy workmanship. People under socialist rule can have no sense of personal pride. Socialist nations leave themselves open to tyranny.

In 1848, Karl Marx, with the help of Friedrich Engels, published a pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. Communism was introduced to the world. Communism is “based on the collective (centralized state) ownership and control of property and the means of production, with all individuals expected to contribute to society according to ability and receive according to need.”

The pamphlet contained four main ideas. The first was the theory of history. It insisted that human history is just a struggle of the classes. The capitalists (bourgeoisie) oppress the workers (proletariat). The “natural” course of the economy must be reached, even if violence was the only answer. The second concept is the “labor theory of value.” It states that the value of a product is measured by the labor put into its production. According to this theory, the laborer should receive the full value since the worker created its value by the amount of labor he/she put into it. Communists maintain that capitalism is wrong because “surplus value” should go to the laborer. (Nice theory, but what about the middle man? Someone must transport the product to market to be sold. Does he/she just not get paid?)

Another communist belief is the “nature of the state.” Marx established that the state is the instrument of the dominating class. Only through violent revolution could that be altered. (Marx seems to have been a great advocate of violence and bloodshed.) As for religion, he concluded that it was only a way people dealt with the harshness of life. (Would life for his people be so harsh if not living under communist rule?) The fourth and last principle of communism is “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Since the proletariat will not be able to govern themselves after revolution, the Communist Party needs to guide and educate them. A totalitarian administration should be set up to lead the people to have a free, classless society. The state will “wither away” when the communist goal is reached. Marx stated in his pamphlet that the goal of communism is “From each according to his ability, to each

according to need."

Capitalism is the only form of economic/government system that promotes the individual and self-worth. Capitalists believe in government "for the people, by the people," to quote Abraham Lincoln. This makes for happier people. Happier people advocate a stronger nation. Both socialism and communism encourage tyranny. While communists blatantly support violent revolution, socialists would rather go about it in a more peaceful way. It is much better for people to be ruled with their consent and not against their will.

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Second Place, General Essay  
Wesson Attendance Center



Sue Elliot, illustrator



# Educational Differences

Heather Shivers

Education is the process of training and developing knowledge, skill, mind and character, especially by formal schooling. Not everyone's education fits this definition exactly, but it does relate closely to this definition. Education varies from person to person and from place to place. In *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, Mill reflects on the education he received as his father's pupil. George Orwell tells of the education young boys received at expensive preparatory schools in "From, 'Such, Such Were the Joys.'" John Stuart Mill and George Orwell received very different educations.

At the age of three, John Stuart Mill began his education under his father's instruction. He started by learning Greek, and his father made cards with the "Greek vocables," as he called them. Mill also had math as a lesson and part of his instruction was in the books he read, which were mainly histories. Mill was not allowed to read many books of amusement. He began to learn Latin during his eighth year and soon commenced to learn Latin with his younger sister who became his pupil. During his boyhood, Mill liked to write histories, but one of his greatest amusements was experimental science. This was in the theoretical sense of the word, not the practical sense. Mill never saw these experiments or tried them; he read about them only. In his essay, Mill says that the education his father gave him was more fitted to "train him to know that to do."

George Orwell, the son of poor parents, was educated at an expensive preparatory school. Orwell attended this school on reduced fees and was always reminded that his parents "wouldn't be able to afford" some things by the instructors and other boys at the school. Orwell began to learn Latin at the age on eight, and at ten he began to learn Greek. After starting Greek, Orwell was placed in the school's scholarship class. Much emphasis was placed on getting a scholarship by Sim and Bingo, the teachers, because they wanted the prestige of having many scholarship winners from their school. Orwell was always told that he would have no chance of a decent future unless he won a scholarship to one of the public schools. Boys in the scholarship class were



crammed with learning that would give the scholarship-test examiners the impression that the student knew more than he did know. The boys were crammed with learning for a period of two to three years. When the instructors thought the pupils were not concentrating, they were caned in order to make them try harder for a scholarship.

Many differences exist in the educations of Mill and Orwell. One difference is that Orwell was always around boys. Because Mill was taught at home by his father, he was hardly ever around boys his age. John Stuart Mill was taught math by his father, and he read about science. At Orwell's school, math was almost neglected and science was not taught in any form. The only subjects that really mattered were Greek and Latin because these subjects were on the exams for scholarships. While Orwell only read passages from Greek and Latin books, Mill read several books by Greek and Latin authors. Perhaps the main difference in their education was that Mill's education was not one of cram. Orwell's education was crammed with learning, and his main job was to make himself look as if he knew more than he really did.

My education has also been quite different from that of Orwell and Mill. I have been taught many different subjects by many different teachers, not just one or two teachers year after year. I have never had Greek or Latin; I took Spanish. I have also never been caned for not concentrating. My education is not crammed with learning as George Orwell's education was. At my school we are taught a little at a time, and what we learn builds for future learning. My education also trains me to do as well as to know. I can take what I have learned and use it to do something, unlike John Stuart Mill.

John Stuart Mill and George Orwell have many differences in their education. They show the differences in being taught at home and at an expensive preparatory school. Everyone's education is different in some way; even people who have attended the same school with the same people all of their lives. No two people have the same education.

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